

AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR OF 1939-1945

SERIES TWO  
NAVY

VOLUME II  
*ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY, 1942-1945*

## AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR OF 1939-1945

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ROYAL AUSTRALIAN  
NAVY  
1942-1945

*by*

G. HERMON GILL

CANBERRA  
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## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Preface</i> . . . . .	xiii
<i>Chronology</i> . . . . .	xvii
 <i>Chapter</i>	
1 SHAPING JAPAN'S PERIMETER . . . . .	1
2 JAPAN'S FIRST CHECK—CORAL SEA . . . . .	25
3 AUSTRALIA'S COASTS RAIDED—HER FLANKS STRENGTHENED . . . . .	58
4 AUSTRALIA—JUNE 1942 . . . . .	100
5 GUADALCANAL—PACIFIC HINGE-PIN . . . . .	114
6 SPARRING FOR THE NORTH . . . . .	158
7 ON AUSTRALIA'S OCEAN COMMUNICATIONS . . . . .	184
8 SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC—PRELUDE TO FLOOD TIDE . . . . .	211
9 THE SUPPLY LINES BATTLE . . . . .	250
10 INDIAN OCEAN—MEDITERRANEAN INTERLUDE . . . . .	294
11 THE MISSION OF KRAIT . . . . .	317
12 ALLIED OFFENSIVES GATHER MOMENTUM . . . . .	326
13 PACIFIC DRIVE—INDIAN OCEAN INTERLUDE . . . . .	362
14 THE ASSAULT ARMADAS STRIKE . . . . .	410
15 STRATEGY FOR VICTORY . . . . .	451
16 PREFACE TO THE PHILIPPINES . . . . .	478
17 LEYTE . . . . .	500
18 OPERATION RIMAU . . . . .	541
19 SUBMARINES' SWANSONG . . . . .	547
20 THE R.A.N. IN BURMA . . . . .	558
21 LINGAYEN GULF . . . . .	575
22 THE BRITISH PACIFIC FLEET JOINS IN . . . . .	594
23 AUSTRALIANS AT TARAKAN . . . . .	616
24 "MOPPING-UP" NEW GUINEA AND THE SOLOMONS . . . . .	625
25 R.A.N. SURVEY KEY TO BRUNEI . . . . .	636

<i>Chapter</i>		<i>Page</i>
26	AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST AMPHIBIOUS ATTACK— BALIKPAPAN . . . . .	646
27	FINAL MILESTONES TO JAPAN'S SURRENDER . . .	659
28	SURRENDER—AND AFTERMATH . . . . .	676
29	EPILOGUE . . . . .	702
APPENDIXES:		
1	The Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships . . .	706
2	The Minesweepers . . . . .	708
3	Peak Strengths—Ships and Personnel—and Casualties	710
4	The R.A.N.V.R. on Mine Disposal . . . . .	714
5	Abbreviations . . . . .	718
	INDEX . . . . .	721

## ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Page</i>
Admiral Sir Guy Royle, R.N. . . . .	30
H.M.A.S. <i>Vampire</i> . . . . .	30
H.M.A.S. <i>Norman</i> . . . . .	30
Kilindini, the Indian Ocean East African base . . . . .	30
The port of Colombo under air attack . . . . .	31
Japanese I-class submarine . . . . .	31
Admiral Chester W. Nimitz . . . . .	31
General Douglas MacArthur with the Australian Prime Minister, Mr John Curtin, at Canberra . . . . .	31
Japanese aircraft carrier <i>Shoho</i> under air attack . . . . .	46
H.M.A.S. <i>Australia</i> in Coral Sea Battle . . . . .	46
Japanese aircraft carrier <i>Shokaku</i> at Coral Sea . . . . .	47
U.S. aircraft carrier <i>Lexington</i> at Coral Sea . . . . .	47
Wreck of <i>Kuttabul</i> after Japanese midget submarine attack . . . . .	78
Wreck of Japanese submarine <i>No. 14</i> . . . . .	78
Japanese cruiser <i>Mogami</i> at Midway . . . . .	79
H.M.A.S. <i>Nestor</i> after explosion of demolition charges, 16th June 1942 . . . . .	79
<i>Macdhui</i> on fire after air attack at Port Moresby . . . . .	126
H.M.A.S. <i>Warrego</i> at Port Moresby . . . . .	126
Nursing Sisters of the R.A.N. . . . .	126
A group of W.R.A.N.S. . . . .	126
Rear-Admiral V. A. C. Crutchley, V.C., R.N. . . . .	127
First Officer S. M. McClemons, Director of W.R.A.N.S. . . . .	127
American shipping after air attacks at Guadalcanal . . . . .	127
Japanese bombing attack at Guadalcanal . . . . .	127
Captain F. E. Getting, R.A.N. . . . .	142
H.M.A.S. <i>Canberra</i> just before sinking . . . . .	142
Coastwatcher headquarters on Guadalcanal . . . . .	143
Headquarters of D.S.I.O., Guadalcanal . . . . .	143
Australian steamer <i>Allara</i> , damaged in submarine attack . . . . .	174
Motor vessel <i>Anshun</i> , capsized in Milne Bay . . . . .	174
H.M.A.S. <i>Norman</i> leaving Capetown . . . . .	175
<i>Voyager</i> ashore on beach at Timor . . . . .	175
H.M.A.S. <i>Ballarat</i> leaving MacLaren Harbour . . . . .	238
Commander C. J. R. Webb at Oro Bay . . . . .	238
Port War Signal Station, Milne Bay . . . . .	239
Dutch transport <i>Van Heutsz</i> in Oro Bay . . . . .	239
Coastwatchers W. J. Read and P. E. Mason . . . . .	270
A Japanese vessel under air attack in Bismarck Sea Battle . . . . .	270
H.M.A.S. <i>Bendigo</i> rescuing survivors of 's <i>Jacob</i> . . . . .	271

	<i>Page</i>
Dutch ship <i>Bantam</i> under air attack at Oro Bay . . . . .	318
H.M.A.S. <i>Pirie</i> after air attack at Oro Bay . . . . .	318
H.M.A.S. <i>Hobart</i> after a torpedo hit . . . . .	318
A Fairmile motor launch . . . . .	318
H.M.A.S. <i>Gascoyne</i> . . . . .	319
H.M.A. Ships <i>Australia</i> , <i>Arunta</i> and <i>Shropshire</i> bombarding at Cape Gloucester	319
The crew and operatives of <i>Krait</i> . . . . .	319
<i>Krait</i> . . . . .	319
<i>Warramunga</i> approaching <i>Australia</i> , March 1944 . . . . .	366
<i>ML424</i> on a night patrol from Madang, April 1944 . . . . .	366
Landing at Hollandia, 22nd April 1944 . . . . .	367
H.M.A.S. <i>Shropshire</i> and ships of Task Force 74 manoeuvring during an air attack, May 1944 . . . . .	367
Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten . . . . .	398
H.M.A.S. <i>Shropshire</i> bombarding Sawar airstrip . . . . .	398
Ship's stewards, H.M.A.S. <i>Shropshire</i> . . . . .	399
Gun's crew, H.M.A.S. <i>Stawell</i> . . . . .	399
Australian M.L's bombarding Karkar Island . . . . .	462
Group of officers and ratings, H.M.A.S. <i>Westralia</i> . . . . .	462
H.M.A.S. <i>Australia</i> bombarding Biak Island . . . . .	463
Rear-Admiral R. S. Berkey, U.S.N., with Rear-Admiral V. A. C. Crutchley, V.C., R.N. . . . .	463
Captain E. F. V. Dechaineux, R.A.N. . . . .	463
Ratings in H.M.A.S. <i>Nizam</i> . . . . .	494
On board <i>Arunta</i> with <i>Australia</i> and <i>Shropshire</i> on the way to Morotai . . . . .	494
The invasion of Leyte, 20th October 1944 . . . . .	495
Landing craft heading for the beaches at Leyte . . . . .	495
Damage to <i>Australia's</i> foremast, control position and bridge, 21st October 1944	526
Japanese battleship <i>Yamato</i> under air attack . . . . .	526
U.S. escort carrier <i>St Lo</i> in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, 25th October 1944	527
Rear-Admiral Sprague's escort carriers in the Philippine Sea battle . . . . .	527
H.M.A.S. <i>Australia</i> , showing damage incurred in Lingayen Gulf . . . . .	558
Captain J. M. Armstrong, R.A.N., with Mr S. M. Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner in London . . . . .	559
Captain H. J. Buchanan, R.A.N. . . . .	559
Lieut-Commander E. A. Feldt, R.A.N., and Commander E. H. Kincaid, U.S.N.	606
Captain R. R. Dowling, R.A.N. . . . .	606
Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, Commander-in-Chief British Pacific Fleet, with Vice-Admiral C. S. Daniel . . . . .	606
Tarakan, 1st May 1945 . . . . .	606
Admiral Sir Louis Hamilton, R.N. . . . .	607
Commander R. B. M. Long, R.A.N. . . . .	607

	<i>Page</i>
Labuan Island, 10th June 1945 . . . . .	607
Balikpapan, July 1945 . . . . .	607
The Japanese surrenders aboard U.S.S. <i>Missouri</i> in Tokyo Bay and H.M.S. <i>Glory</i> at Rabaul . . . . .	670
H.M.A.S. <i>Glenelg</i> disembarking recovered prisoners of war at Morotai . . .	670
Civilian survivors from New Ireland aboard H.M.A.S. <i>Swan</i> . . . . .	670
Men "behind the scenes" at the Navy Office: A. R. Nankervis, G. L. Macandie, W. H. Brooksbank and T. J. Hawkins . . . . .	671
Cover of magazine of British Pacific Fleet . . . . .	671

## MAPS

	<i>Page</i>
Midget submarine raid on Sydney Harbour, 31st May-1st June 1942 . . . . .	69
The Battles of Midway and Malta, June 1942 . . . . .	83
The Battle of Savo Island, 9th August 1942 . . . . .	148
Allied and enemy supply problems, New Guinea area, June 1942-June 1943 . . . . .	263
Battle for Biak, 7th-10th June 1944 . . . . .	428
The mounting pressure of Allied sea power, 1944 . . . . .	452
The Battles for Leyte, October 1944 . . . . .	502
Activities of the R.A.N. in the war . . . . .	678

## SKETCH MAPS

	<i>Page</i>
Japanese invasion of New Guinea, 5th-10th March 1942 . . . . .	7
Japanese western advances, March 1942 . . . . .	11
Japanese incursion into Bay of Bengal, April 1942 . . . . .	17
South-West Pacific and Pacific Areas, April 1942 . . . . .	33
Major movements in Coral Sea Battle, 1st-5th May 1942 . . . . .	43
Major movements in Coral Sea Battle, 5th-11th May 1942 . . . . .	48
Sydney Harbour raid: picking-up positions, May 1942 . . . . .	66
Japanese submarines on the Australian coast, 1942 . . . . .	79
"Vigorous" convoy and loss of <i>Nestor</i> , June 1942 . . . . .	94
Moves in Solomons-New Guinea area, June-August 1942 . . . . .	119
Milne Bay, 24th August-26th October 1942 . . . . .	169
Madagascar, August-September 1942 . . . . .	188
Raiders and submarines in the Indian Ocean, 1942 . . . . .	192
<i>Bengal</i> and <i>Ondina</i> action, 11th November 1942 . . . . .	194
Loss of H.M.A.S. <i>Armidale</i> . . . . .	217
Milne Bay-Cape Cretin, December 1942 . . . . .	244
Japanese submarines off eastern Australian coast, 1943 . . . . .	255
Torpedoing of H.M.A.S. <i>Hobart</i> . . . . .	291
Australian corvettes in the Mediterranean, May-October 1943 . . . . .	300
Cruise of the <i>Krait</i> . . . . .	320
DEXTERITY operation, November 1943-January 1944 . . . . .	339
Raiders and submarines, Indian Ocean 1943 . . . . .	356
Raiders and submarines, Indian Ocean 1944 . . . . .	389
Hollandia assault, April 1944 . . . . .	403
Biak assault, May 1944 . . . . .	421
Small ships on northern New Guinea coast, 1944 . . . . .	437
Noemfoor, Sansapor and Morotai, July to September 1944 . . . . .	442
Surface bombardments by Eastern Fleet, 1944 . . . . .	464
The Battle of Surigao Strait, 25th October 1944 . . . . .	523



	<i>Page</i>
Operations on Burma coast, January 1944 . . . . .	563
Attack forces approaching Lingayen Gulf, 3rd-9th January 1945 . . . . .	580
Lingayen Gulf, 9th January 1945 . . . . .	588
Borneo assaults, May-July 1945 . . . . .	618
Bougainville Island . . . . .	634
Stepping stones to Japan, 1944-45 . . . . .	662
R.A.N. ships at Japanese surrender points . . . . .	680

## PREFACE

THE first naval volume in the official series *Australia in the War of 1939-1945* covered the period from 1919 to March 1942. The portion thereof up to September 1939, though brief, was necessary because of the changes and developments which occurred during those twenty years. These were political, economic and material. Politically Australia was affected in the British sphere in the increase in her stature, and the weight of her representations at conferences with her companions. With them, too, she was concerned in the effects in the international field of politics and economics on the balance of power between nations. Indeed, in essence she was, by political and economic considerations in the world scene and by material developments in the naval, subjected to a geographic change. It was borne in upon her, with growing realization during the war, that geographically she was of the eastern and not the western world.

On the material side in the navy, innovations were such as to impose important tactical changes. There was some foreshadowing of these in the capital ship versus aircraft controversy in Britain in 1936. The outcome of this was the production of a report by the Capital Ship Committee which was strongly and unanimously in favour of the capital ship, and resulted in the implementation of the Admiralty battleship building program. It was the lessons of the first two years of the war which speeded up the changes. Up till then the battleship figured as the main unit in the wartime building programs of all the major naval powers, with Japan producing the largest and most heavily gunned vessels the world had known in *Yamato* and *Musashi*.

But in November 1940 the British Mediterranean Fleet wrote a new chapter in naval tactics when, on the 11th of the month, aircraft from H.M.S. *Illustrious* attacked the Italian Fleet in Taranto Harbour and sank two battleships, the *Littorio* (later renamed *Italia*) and the *Conte di Cavour*; severely damaged and immobilised a third, *Caio Duilio*; and damaged the cruiser *Trento* and two destroyers. Operation JUDGMENT, as the attack on the Italians at Taranto was named, provided in its result a signpost to the future. Recalling it in later years, in *A Sailor's Odyssey*, the then Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, wrote: "Taranto, and the night of November 11th-12th, 1940, should be remembered for ever as having shown once and for all that in the Fleet Air Arm the Navy has its most devastating weapon. In a total flying time of about six and a half hours—carrier to carrier—twenty aircraft had inflicted more damage upon the Italian fleet than was inflicted upon the German High Sea Fleet in the daylight action at the Battle of Jutland." It was doubtless remembered by Admiral Yamamoto as an inspiration for the Japanese air attack on the American fleet in Pearl Harbour in the early morning of Sunday, 7th December 1941.

Soon, during the progress of this Second World War at sea, the potency of the air weapon was to be appreciated. Before the conflict ended, its

supplanting of the big gun, with the consequent substitution of the aircraft carrier for the battleship, was to be obvious and in progress. This change in naval material, and the changes it imposed on tactics, is illustrated in this volume of the history in an entirely new form of sea battle, and the final example of the classic old. In the Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942 was fought the first major sea fight in which the opposing surface forces did not get within sight or striking distance of each other. All the blows struck were between the carrier-borne aircraft and the ships of the antagonists. Two-and-a-half years later, in the Battle of Surigao Strait, was fought the last major line-of-battle sea fight between opposing fleets of battleships and their ancillary vessels. It was a naval action which inspired the American naval historian, Admiral S. E. Morison, to write in the volume *Leyte* in his *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, that in it was seen and heard in the gunfire "a funeral salute to a finished era of naval warfare. One can imagine the ghosts of all great admirals from Raleigh to Jellicoe standing at attention as Battle Line went into oblivion, along with the Greek phalanx, the Spanish wall of pikemen, the English longbow and the row-galley tactics of Salamis and Lepanto."

In both of these history-making sea fights, ships and men of the Royal Australian Navy took part.

That navy itself shared, also, in the changes which the war brought. It grew in numbers, of both ships and men, to a peak of 337 vessels of all categories from cruisers and destroyers to motor launches and other small craft; and to 36,976 officers and ratings—to which must be added 2,617 officers and ratings of the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service, and 57 Nursing Sisters.

There was another marked change in the Royal Australian Navy in the war period covered by this present volume; its "coming of age" in respect to its higher command. June 1944 saw the first appointment—as Commodore, First Class—of a graduate of the Royal Australian Naval College to the command of the Squadron. Henceforward that position was occupied by an Australian. It was a step towards the appointment—after the war—of a graduate of the Royal Australian Naval College to the highest service position the Australian Navy could offer—First Naval Member and Chief of the Naval Staff.

The sea war of 1939-45—and especially that period of it discussed in this volume—brought epoch-making changes in the conduct of naval warfare. But it brought no change in the nature of sea power, its practice, and its influence. The most important road on the earth's surface is the sea road. The world's most important vehicle is the carrying ship. The greatest influence in the history of mankind is that which controls the sea road and the carrying ship that follows that road—the influence of sea power. Victory goes hand in hand with control of the sea road, and the power to ensure or gainsay the passage of the carrying ship along that road.

How the Allies and their navies exercised that power, and the part Australian ships and men played, it has been the task of the author to record in this volume. In that task, as in the writing of this volume's predecessor, he has received invaluable help. He has been untrammelled in his access to sources of official information, and official records: reports of Commanders-in-Chief; of commanding officers of individual ships; war diaries and letters-of-proceedings of ships and naval establishments; personal accounts of engagements and experiences. He has drawn upon published works—to which acknowledgment is made in footnotes. Nothing has been withheld from him; and he has been given complete freedom of expression, and of statement of opinion, on his own responsibility.

As in the writing of the previous volume, he owes his greatest debt to the General Editor, Mr Gavin Long. From him he has received unfailing inspiration by precept and example; constant encouragement; sympathetic understanding, and sage editorial comment. His contribution cannot be over-estimated. His devotion to his task as General Editor has been reflected in his staff in the generous help always received from them. Among them, Mr A. J. (Bill) Sweeting has been a reliable support, a wise counsellor, and fruitful of constructive suggestions. Mr Hugh Groser has added greatly to the value of this work—as he did to that of the first volume—with his first class charts. Miss Mary Gilchrist has been a thoughtful and patient friend and adviser, who has borne with the author over a long period of checking and correction of typescripts, of preparation of footnotes, of proof reading, amending and indexing.

A great deal is owed to Mr J. K. Ware, in charge of the Archives at Navy Office, Melbourne, and his staff. He personally helped tirelessly in research and the provision of source material. He carefully read the whole volume in manuscript, and checked against official records. And he assisted in the selection of photographs. In the writing of this volume the author sadly missed the masterly guidance and penetrating comment of the late Commander R. B. M. Long, R.A.N., whose untimely death denied him the help so valuable in the preparation of its forerunner. A number of others gave generously of their time and knowledge to read and comment upon sections of the work. And, again, the author is indebted to his wife for her forbearance and encouragement in his task.

G.H.G.

*Middle Park,  
Melbourne,  
22nd April 1968.*

## CHRONOLOGY

*Events described in this volume are printed in italics*

- |      |           |                                                         |
|------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 1942 | 23 Mar    | Japanese occupy Andaman Islands                         |
|      | 5 Apr     | <i>Japanese carrier-borne aircraft attack Colombo</i>   |
|      | 5-8 May   | <i>Battle of the Coral Sea</i>                          |
|      | 20 May    | Allied forces withdraw from Burma                       |
|      | 31 May-   |                                                         |
|      | 1 Jun     | <i>Japanese midget submarine raid on Sydney Harbour</i> |
|      | 4-6 Jun   | <i>Battle of Midway Island</i>                          |
|      | 21 Jul    | Japanese land Buna-Gona area, Papua                     |
|      | 7 Aug     | <i>Americans land in Solomons</i>                       |
|      | 8-9 Aug   | <i>Naval Battle of Savo Island</i>                      |
|      | 19 Aug    | Dieppe raid                                             |
|      | 25-26 Aug | <i>Japanese land at Milne Bay</i>                       |
|      | 23-24 Oct | Battle of El Alamein begins                             |
|      | 2 Nov     | Kokoda recaptured                                       |
|      | 7-8 Nov   | Allied landings in French North Africa                  |
|      | 12-15 Nov | <i>Naval Battle of Guadalcanal</i>                      |
| 1943 | 23 Jan    | Organised Japanese resistance in Papua ends             |
|      | 29 Jan    | British Eighth Army enters Tripoli                      |
|      | 2-4 Mar   | <i>Battle of Bismarck Sea</i>                           |
|      | 18 Apr    | <i>Death of Admiral Yamamoto</i>                        |
|      | 11 May    | American forces land on Attu in Aleutian Islands        |
|      | 13 May    | Campaign in North Africa ends                           |
|      | 14 May    | <i>Hospital ship Centaur sunk by Japanese</i>           |
|      | 30 Jun    | American landings on New Georgia                        |
|      | 10 Jul    | <i>Allies invade Sicily</i>                             |
|      | 3 Sep     | Allies invade Italy                                     |
|      | 11 Sep    | Salamaua falls                                          |
|      | 16 Sep    | 7th and 9th Divisions enter Lae                         |
|      | 1 Nov     | Americans land on Bougainville in northern Solomons     |
|      | 15 Dec    | <i>Americans land on New Britain</i>                    |
| 1944 | 23 Jan    | Shaggy Ridge cleared                                    |
|      | 31 Jan    | Americans invade Marshall Islands                       |
|      | 29 Feb    | <i>Americans invade Admiralty Islands</i>               |
|      | 22 Apr    | <i>Americans land at Hollandia and Aitape</i>           |

	24 Apr	Australians enter Madang
	27 May	<i>Americans land on Biak Island</i>
	6 Jun	Allied forces invade Normandy
	15 Jun	Americans invade Saipan in the Marianas
	19-20 Jun	<i>Battle of the Philippine Sea</i>
	2 Jul	<i>Americans land on Noemfoor</i>
	21 Jul	<i>Americans invade Guam</i>
	15 Aug	Allies invade southern France
	15 Sep	<i>Americans land in Palau Islands and on Morotai in the Halmaheras</i>
	10 Oct	<i>U.S. Third Fleet attacks Okinawa</i>
	20 Oct	<i>Americans land on Leyte</i>
	23-26 Oct	<i>Naval Battle of Leyte Gulf</i>
1945	3 Jan	Allies occupy Akyab in Burma
	9 Jan	<i>American forces land on Luzon</i>
	19 Feb	American forces land on Iwo Jima
	10 Mar	<i>American forces land on Mindanao</i>
	1 Apr	<i>American forces land on Okinawa</i>
	12 Apr	Death of President Roosevelt
	28 Apr	Mussolini shot by partisans in Italy
	30 Apr	Hitler commits suicide in Berlin
	1 May	<i>Australians invade Tarakan</i>
	3 May	British troops capture Rangoon
	7 May	Germany surrenders unconditionally
	11 May	Wewak captured by 6th Australian Division
	10 Jun	<i>9th Australian Division lands at Brunei Bay</i>
	26 Jun	United Nations Charter signed at San Francisco
	1 Jul	<i>7th Australian Division lands at Balikpapan</i>
	5 Jul	Death of Australian Prime Minister, John Curtin
	6 Aug	First atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima
	15 Aug	<i>VJ-Day. All offensive action against Japan comes to an end</i>
	2 Sep	<i>Japanese sign instrument of surrender in Tokyo Bay</i>

## CHAPTER 1

### SHAPING JAPAN'S PERIMETER

ON 18th March 1942 President Roosevelt of the United States of America telegraphed to Mr Churchill, Prime Minister of Britain: "There is no use giving a single further thought to Singapore or the Dutch East Indies. They are gone. Australia must be held, and we are willing to undertake that. . . . You must hold Egypt, the Canal, Syria, Iran and the route to the Caucasus." It was a summary which defined the problems facing Britain and America east of Suez in the three main tasks of keeping Russia effectively in the war, preventing a German and Japanese junction in the Indian Ocean area, and halting Japanese advances towards India on the one hand, or Australia and the South-West Pacific on the other.

Much of Europe now lay under German domination, its nations contributing, as allies or under duress, to German military forces and the production of munitions of war. The west coast of the Continent, from the North Cape to the Spanish border, was in German hands. The Iberian Peninsula, except for the two-and-a-quarter square miles of Gibraltar, enjoyed a skilfully maintained neutrality. But within the Mediterranean, from the farthestmost limit of the Gulf of Lions in the west to the Graeco-Turkish frontier by Gallipoli in the east, the European coastline was the southern rampart of Germany's "Fortress Europe". East of the Mediterranean, the rampart marched with the Black Sea coasts of Bulgaria and Rumania, and with that of Russia, some 400 miles E.N.E. of the Rumanian border to the easternmost point of the Sea of Azov hard by the mouth of the Don. From there it followed a Russian-imposed line roughly N.N.W. via Kharkov, Kursk, Orel, Rzhev, and Lake Ilmen to Lake Ladoga and invested Leningrad. Across the Mediterranean, the African coastline and hinterland from Gazala some 40 miles west of Tobruk to the Atlantic abreast of the Canary Islands (except for the 200 miles or so stretch of Spanish Morocco opposite Gibraltar) were either Axis-occupied or Axis-dominated. In all, the western Axis shadow lay over an area of roughly 4,000,000 square miles embraced within the parallels of 30 degrees and 70 degrees north, and the meridians of Greenwich and 40 degrees east.

In the eastern hemisphere the rays of Japan's rising sun, shooting swiftly outwards from the core of her position in the north-west Pacific in the fourteen weeks from her entry into the war, now rested on boundary lines which ran near by the parallels of 5 degrees south and 50 degrees north and the meridians of 90 degrees and 170 degrees east, and enclosed an area somewhat more than double that over which her western allies crouched. But whereas theirs was in the main a land area, hers was sea in the greater proportion, largely held by isolated air bases and garrisons wholly dependent on sea power for their security and nourishment.

Sea power, too, could either link in a strengthening physical unity the two isolated Axis "fortresses" of the western and eastern hemispheres, or keep them separated and eventually bring about their defeat in detail. President Roosevelt's telegram of 18th March stressed the importance of holding the two chief gateways, control of which was vital to the democracies in ensuring the security of their ocean communications: Australia, at the junction of the Indian and Pacific Oceans; and the Middle East, "Fortress Europe's" sally port.

At this juncture both gateways were threatened, and their protection was made the more difficult for the Allies by the fact that the vital Battle of the Atlantic was at a crucial stage, making heavy demands on the depleted naval strength of both British and Americans. Britain's naval and air weakness in the Mediterranean had led to the temporary elimination of Malta as a naval base, and that island's neutralisation as an air base from which to strike at enemy shipping; to the almost unobstructed passage of reinforcements and supplies to the German and Italian forces in North Africa; and to General Rommel's success there in driving the British back from western Cyrenaica to the line Gazala-Bir Hacheim. At the end of March the British Mediterranean Fleet was reduced to four cruisers and 15 destroyers, while only the small aircraft carrier *Argus* and two or three destroyers remained fit for service at Gibraltar. On the other hand, the Italians had four serviceable battleships, nine cruisers, and 55 destroyers and torpedo boats; and German and Italian submarines in the Mediterranean numbered 50, to the 15 of the Allies. The Axis powers were much stronger in the air, and over large areas of the central and eastern Mediterranean British ships could be given no fighter cover. An attempt in February to succour Malta with a convoy from Alexandria failed, and the situation of the island, continuously subjected to fierce air attacks, was parlous. Rommel now gathered strength for an assault on Egypt, as a preliminary to which the capture of Malta was considered. For some twelve months the Germans had envisaged this operation, in which the Italians also took an increasing interest which led to their beginning, in January 1942, to train for a sea and airborne attack on the island. On 8th March the Prince of Piedmont accepted command of *Army Group South*, which was intended for an assault the Italians hoped to be ready to mount in July. Farther east, in Russia, the winter campaign was drawing to a close, and Hitler planned an offensive to force a break-through to the Caucasus and the rich oilfields of Maikop, Grozny, and Baku.

To further their own plans the Germans were anxious for whatever strain the Japanese could impose on Allied communications in the Indian Ocean. On 8th January the three Axis powers had signed a formal military agreement in which the meridian of 70 degrees east was accepted as the boundary between the German-Italian and Japanese military zones, though it was stipulated that: "In the Indian Ocean operations may be carried out beyond the agreed boundary if required by the prevailing situation." In German eyes the prevailing situation now called for Japanese



naval activity west of the 70th meridian. On 13th April Admiral Raeder, the German naval Commander-in-Chief, returned to an oft-harped-on theme when he stressed to Hitler the importance of Japanese action in the Indian Ocean, reinforcing his argument with references to Allied aid to Russia. He pointed out that

in particular the supplies reaching Russia on the Basra-Iran route will go to the Russian Caucasus and southern fronts. . . . Every ton of supplies which the enemy manages to get through to the Near East means a continuous reinforcement of the enemy war potential, makes our own operations in the Caucasus more difficult, and strengthens the British position in the Near East and Egypt. The German High Command is, therefore, intensely interested in having these British and American supply shipments in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea attacked and disrupted as soon and as effectively as possible. As matters stand, only the Japanese are in a position to do this.<sup>1</sup>

Raeder told Hitler that in talks with Admiral Nomura, leader of the Japanese Liaison Staff, the German Naval Staff had repeatedly reminded him of the necessity for Japanese naval operations in the northern part of the Indian Ocean, and that Nomura had indicated time and again that Japan was willing to harass supply lines to India in her own interests, and also intended to operate in the western part of the Indian Ocean with submarines and surface raiders.

There was some basis for Nomura's assurances, though Japanese views diverged regarding future plans. There were three schools of naval thought. The Japanese Admiralty Planning Staff, led by its chief, Captain Sadatoshi Tomioka, favoured a southward advance to Samoa and Fiji, to cut Pacific communications and isolate Australia. The Chief of the Operations Division of the Combined Fleet, Captain Kameto Kuroshima, advised an offensive against Ceylon and the western Indian Ocean. The Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Yamamoto, and his Chief of Staff, Rear-Admiral Matoma Ugaki, wanted to thrust eastwards towards Midway and Hawaii and a final reckoning with the U.S. Pacific Fleet. In the meantime, of the above-mentioned recommendations, the first two were followed to a limited extent as part of the plan to build up a defence barrier enclosing the Japanese area of conquest.

At this time the Japanese were able to concentrate naval and air strength in the western Pacific and eastern Indian Oceans superior either to the American or the British respectively. Their naval losses in the four months of war had been trifling. Their strength remained at 11 battleships, 6 large and 4 light aircraft carriers, 18 heavy and 21 light cruisers, and approximately 100 destroyers and 60 submarines. The Americans had, in the Pacific, seven battleships (*Maryland, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Colorado, New Mexico, Mississippi, and Idaho*) which, unfit for fleet operations against the Japanese, were engaged on convoy escort duties between Hawaii and the West Coast; 5 aircraft carriers (*Lexington, Enterprise, Saratoga,*

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<sup>1</sup> *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs* (1945), 13 Apr 1942, Annex 5.

*Yorktown*, and *Hornet*<sup>2</sup>); 13 heavy and 12 light cruisers; 92 destroyers and 61 submarines. To these could be added the Australian heavy cruisers *Australia* and *Canberra* and light cruiser *Hobart*—though *Canberra* was in Sydney refitting and *Hobart* was in Western Australia. *Australia* was the flagship of Rear-Admiral J. G. Crace, R.N., of the Australian Squadron, who was in command of the "Anzac Force", then comprising the heavy cruisers H.M.A.S. *Australia* and U.S.S. *Chicago*; the light cruisers H.M.N.Z. Ships *Achilles* and *Leander*; and the U.S. destroyers *Perkins* and *Lamson*. Based on Noumea, the squadron was under the operational control of Vice-Admiral Herbert F. Leary, U.S.N., who, with the title Comanzac, was responsible for control of Allied Naval Forces in defence of the Anzac Area, and for ocean escort to the boundaries of the area. This area embraced eastern New Guinea, the eastern Australian seaboard from Cape York to Cape Otway, the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago, the Solomons, the Fiji Islands, New Hebrides, New Caledonia and New Zealand, and the surrounding seas. Its northern limit was the equator, and its eastern the meridian of 175 degrees west.

In the Indian Ocean the British Eastern Fleet was not yet concentrated. On 9th March its only modernised battleship, *Warspite* (which had been in Bremerton Navy Yard, Puget Sound, on the west coast of America, repairing the damage suffered at Crete), left Spencer Gulf, South Australia, on her way to Ceylon; and four days later the aircraft carrier *Formidable* sailed from Capetown, also bound for the Eastern Fleet's base. The only other battleships with the Eastern Fleet were *Resolution*, *Ramillies*, *Royal Sovereign* and *Revenge* which, like their American counterparts with the Pacific Fleet, were unfit for fleet action against the modernised Japanese ships.

Both the British and Americans had modern battleships in commission, the British *King George V* and *Duke of York*, and the Americans *Washington* and *North Carolina*, but these were needed in the Battle of the Atlantic and in the covering forces for the northern supply convoys to Russia. Actually the Americans had been on the point of sending *Washington* and *North Carolina* (which, newly commissioned, had been working up in the Atlantic) to join the Pacific Fleet, when a British request for assistance decided them to retain the two ships in the Atlantic. On 14th March Mr Churchill told President Roosevelt that, because of the possibility of the Japanese establishing in the Vichy French island of Madagascar bases from which they could menace the western entrances to the Indian Ocean and British communications with the Middle East, India, and Russia, it had been decided to secure control of the island's main harbour of Diego Suarez. It would be necessary to use Force "H", at Gibraltar, in this expedition, and Churchill asked if it would be possible for the American Atlantic Fleet temporarily to send "two battleships, an aircraft carrier, some cruisers and destroyers" to replace Force "H" in covering the

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<sup>2</sup> *Hornet*, US aircraft carrier (1941), 20,000 tons, eight 5-in and sixteen 1.1-in AA guns, 81-85 aircraft, 34 kts. Lost in battle of Santa Cruz Is, 27 Oct 1942.

western exit of the Mediterranean. The request was met by retaining *Washington* and *North Carolina* in the Atlantic, and attaching an American squadron to the British Home Fleet, thus relieving British ships therefrom to take the place of Force "H" at Gibraltar.

For the time being, then, it was necessary for the British in the Middle East and Indian Ocean, and the Americans in the Pacific, to remain on the defensive, while taking every opportunity for limited offensives. In the Pacific the immediate Allied task was to secure Australia and New Zealand and prevent or hamper further Japanese advances to the south. In furtherance of these aims three American carrier task forces—Vice-Admiral William F. Halsey's *Enterprise* group, Vice-Admiral Wilson Brown's *Lexington* group, and Rear-Admiral Frank J. Fletcher's *Yorktown* group—operated during January, February and March, covering the reinforcement of Samoa and carrying out a number of air strikes against Japanese positions and forces: Wotje, Maloelap, Kwajalein, Jaluit and Mili in the Marshalls; Makin in the Gilbert Islands; Wake Island, and Marcus Island some 700 miles to the north-west of Wake.

## II

On 23rd January 1942 the Japanese had invaded and occupied Rabaul. Six days later, Japanese Imperial Headquarters issued a directive to Admiral Yamamoto:

The army and navy, working together, will occupy the Lae and Salamaua sectors as quickly as possible. At the proper time the navy, independently, will occupy Tulagi and secure an air base (a civilian seaplane base). If possible the army and navy will work jointly and occupy Port Moresby after the occupation of Lae and Salamaua.<sup>3</sup>

The Japanese attack on Rabaul had been foreseen in an appreciation made by the Director of Naval Intelligence, Melbourne (Commander R. B. M. Long, R.A.N.) in December 1941, in which he suggested the possibility of a further Japanese penetration to the New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Fiji-Samoa "in view of the strategic value of these areas to Japan vis-à-vis American-British trans-Pacific communications". On 27th January—two days before the issue of the Japanese directive—the Australian Chief of the Naval Staff, Vice-Admiral Sir Guy Royle, signalled to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, remarking that the enemy's occupation of Rabaul increased the threat to Port Moresby and New Caledonia, and that while he understood that American troops were due to reach Australia soon to garrison New Caledonia, a strong Allied naval concentration in the area was desirable to anticipate prior Japanese action. This thought was already in American minds and led to the dispatch of Vice-Admiral Wilson Brown's *Lexington* task force to reinforce the Anzac Area. Wilson Brown planned a carrier-borne air attack on Japanese ships and installations at Rabaul on 21st

<sup>3</sup> "Eastern New Guinea Invasion Operations", Japanese Monograph No. 96, compiled from official and private records by Commander Sakuji Mikami, IJN, former staff officer in charge of operations during the period covered.

February but, owing to loss of surprise, cancelled the operation the day previously after successfully fighting off a determined Japanese air attack on his force.

The American division of troops for New Caledonia—the “Americal Division”, under the command of Major-General Alexander M. Patch—reached Melbourne, where the ships had to be restowed, on 26th February in Convoy “BT.200”, of seven ships escorted by the American light cruiser *Honolulu*. On 7th March as Convoy “ZK.7” they left Melbourne for Noumea, again escorted by *Honolulu* and under cover of an Allied force in the Anzac Area, which had again been strengthened by the addition of another carrier group. On 10th March “ZK.7” was joined at sea by the American cruiser *New Orleans* and destroyer *Mugford*,<sup>4</sup> escorting two American ships, *Perida* (6,579 tons) and *Pennant* (6,576 tons), and the augmented convoy and escorts reached Noumea on 12th March.

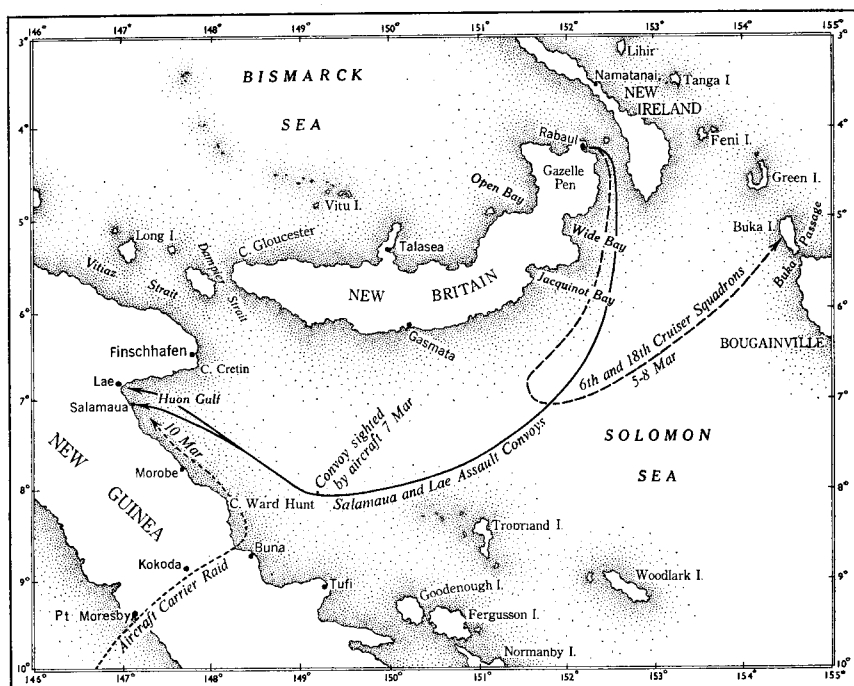
The day Convoy “ZK.7” left Melbourne, an Allied aircraft patrolling north of New Guinea, sighted a Japanese convoy of one cruiser, four destroyers, and six transports<sup>5</sup> about 56 miles north-east of Buna. This was the force for the New Guinea invasion which formed the subject of the Imperial Headquarters directive of 29th January. The invasion forces, which were assembled and organised at Rabaul on 3rd March, sailed from there on the 5th. They comprised an army detachment of one infantry battalion, one battery of mountain artillery, and a number “of other army units” in the transports *Yokohama Maru* (6,143 tons) and *China Maru* (5,869 tons) for Salamaua, and a naval landing force for Lae. Other ships in the convoy included transports, minelayers, and mine-sweepers. Escort was provided by units of the 6th Destroyer Squadron and its leader, light cruiser *Yubari*. Air support was by the naval 24th Air Flotilla, seaplane tender *Kiyokawa Maru* (6,862 tons); and surface support by 6th (*Aoba*, *Kinugasa*, *Kako* and *Furutaka*) and 18th (*Tenryu* and *Tatsuta*) Cruiser Squadrons, which were also charged with the task of securing a proposed fleet anchorage in Queen Carola Harbour, Buka Island. During 7th March the forces separated for their respective destinations, and on the 8th the army force landed at Salamaua and the navy detachments at Lae. In neither place was there any opposition on shore; but in an attack by a single Allied aircraft on 8th March, the transport *Yokohama Maru* suffered slight damage and had one man killed. That morning the six cruisers of the 6th and 18th Squadrons, and two destroyers, anchored in Queen Carola Harbour. Parties from the ships surveyed and buoyed the harbour, and some landed and interviewed a copra planter, Percy Good, whose plantation was at Kessa on the north-west tip of Buka. Good, who had previously been a radio mechanic, had been a member of the coastwatching organisation. But because Kessa was on a low exposed spit unsuitable as an observation post, and Good was too old to take

<sup>4</sup> *Mugford*, US destroyer (1937), 1,500 tons, four 5-in guns, sixteen 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

<sup>5</sup> Ships, such as minelayers *Tenyo Maru* and *Tsugaru*, and gunboat *Kongo Maru*, were probably wrongly reported as transports.

to the jungle, he had a few days earlier been instructed to cease reporting, and his teleradio had been removed for use by a military reporting party at an elevated post. Good therefore did not report the arrival of the Japanese ships, and gave his parole to the enemy landing party. Later, in the afternoon, the ships left Queen Carola Harbour and swept the area.

Although Good did not report the movements of the Japanese ships, they were seen by a planter, F. P. Archer, on Yame Island, ten miles



Japanese invasion of New Guinea, 5th-10th March 1942

south, and he reported their presence, and departure, to coastwatcher Read,<sup>6</sup> who was Assistant District Officer at Aravia, a thousand feet up in the jungle in northern Bougainville. Read teleradioed reports of the Japanese movements to Port Moresby, whence they were relayed to Melbourne. That night the Australian news broadcast told of the presence in Carola Haven of the enemy warships. The Japanese, hearing the news and knowing that they had not been sighted by air reconnaissance, wrongly concluded that Good (in whose house they found pieces of radio equipment) had broken his parole and reported them. They returned to Carola Haven, seized,

<sup>6</sup> Lt-Cdr W. J. Read; RANVR. Maj Angau 1944-46. Assistant District Officer; of Buka Passage, Bougainville; b. Hobart, 18 Sep 1905.

questioned, and killed him, and barely covered the body in a shallow grave in the garden of his house, whence it was removed and decently buried by the frightened natives after the Japanese left. Good's body, which Read exhumed and reburied when he heard of the murder after the departure of the Japanese, bore evidence of brutal treatment apparently administered during interrogation.

The incident led to the immediate commissioning or enlistment in the navy of all the coastwatchers, so as to give them combatant status and the implied protection thereof if captured, and pension rights for their dependants if they were killed. It was a measure for which the D.N.I., Long, and his representative in charge of the coastwatchers, Lieutenant-Commander E. A. Feldt, Supervising Intelligence Officer, North Eastern Area, had for some months unsuccessfully importuned the Naval Board.

### III

Meanwhile the enemy invasion of New Guinea offered an opportunity for the Allies to hit back. The Allied decision to treat Germany as the main enemy imposed a temporary strategic defensive in the Pacific, but it was not intended that it should be a passive defence. From the outset Admiral Ernest J. King, the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet, planned for attack, visualising a north-westerly drive against Japan from the New Hebrides into the Solomon Islands and Bismarck Archipelago. The establishment of fuelling bases and airfields on the trans-Pacific route was a first step in this direction—a fuelling station at Borabora Island in the Society Group; an advanced naval base at Tongatapu in the Tonga Islands; island airfields at Johnston, Palmyra and Canton Islands, and at Suva and Nandi in the Fiji Islands. Now the military occupation of New Caledonia paved the way for the establishment of a base in the New Hebrides. It was to safeguard the transport of troops to New Caledonia that King had reinforced the Anzac Area with a second carrier force—Task Force 17, *Yorktown*, under the command of Rear-Admiral Fletcher.

At the beginning of March Allied Intelligence reports indicated that the Japanese had withdrawn ships from Rabaul, and Admiral Wilson Brown, with Task Force 11, *Lexington*, thought that this might mean a concentration, in an area secure from air attack, for assaults on the Solomons or Moeresby, or possibly an all-out assault on Java. On 3rd March he wrote to Rear-Admiral Crace, Anzac Force:

As you know, Fletcher with Task Force 17 has been directed to join us, if weather permits, at noon on March 6 at a point 300 miles north of Noumea. The C-in-C U.S. Fleet<sup>7</sup> has directed that (a) the senior U.S. naval officer present shall assume command of naval forces in Anzac Area; (b) that one, or preferably both, task forces remain in the Anzac Area until after the army has become established in Noumea; and (c) that the naval forces in the Anzac Area shall carry out an offensive role whenever opportunity presents itself rather than a passive protection

<sup>7</sup> Though operating in Anzac Area, which was under the operational command of Vice-Admiral Leary as Comanzac, Wilson Brown was under the direct operational control of C-in-C US Fleet (Cominch).

of army units. It appears to me that an opportunity for offensive action by us will present itself only when and if the enemy initiates further offensive action in our area. I repeat that I consider his air position around Rabaul, combined with the physical geographical difficulties of successful surprise approach, too formidable to warrant risking two of our three carriers in the Pacific.

Crace, whose original directive from Comanzac was that he, while cooperating with Task Force 11, should "seek out and destroy inferior enemy forces", among other things, was concerned lest his coming under Wilson Brown's command should relegate him to a purely supporting role with the carriers. This, he felt, would unfavourably affect morale in his flagship, and also have repercussions in Australia. He was therefore pleased when, two days later, he was told that it was planned to carry out carrier air strikes and surface bombardments on Rabaul and Gasmata in New Britain, and that *Australia*, *Chicago*, and two destroyers were to carry out the Gasmata bombardment. But on the 7th March came the report of the Japanese move towards New Guinea, and the plan was quickly changed to an attack on the Japanese ships at Salamaua and Lae.

The striking force for this operation consisted of *Lexington* and *Yorktown*, the heavy cruisers, *Minneapolis*, *San Francisco*, *Indianapolis*, *Pensacola* and ten destroyers. The air strike was carried out in the early forenoon of 10th March from a position about 45 miles south of Papua, and the 104 aircraft from the two carriers flew through a pass in the Owen Stanley Range to descend upon the enemy ships at Salamaua, Lae, and on the adjacent sea. No air resistance was met, and only one aircraft, with its crew of two, was lost.

For this operation Crace's force was augmented and designated Attack Group 11.7. The group consisted of the heavy cruisers *Australia* and U.S. Ships *Chicago*, *Astoria* and *Louisville*, and the U.S. destroyers *Anderson*, *Hammann*, *Hughes* and *Sims*.<sup>8</sup> To the regret of those in *Australia*, the role was one of passive support. Crace's directions were: "To operate generally in an area south-east of Rossel Island and beyond a 600-mile radius from Rabaul. Object, to cover operations of the carriers in the Gulf of Papua from a position which would permit striking enemy forces proceeding towards Moresby or New Caledonia."

Some damage was inflicted on the Japanese forces in this air attack, but not to the extent optimistically claimed by the attackers at the time, nor on such a scale as to have any effect on the Japanese invasion of New Guinea. The American aviators' reports led to the belief that the Japanese had suffered the loss by sinking of five transports, two heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, one destroyer and probably a minesweeper; and that an additional two destroyers and two patrol craft were seriously damaged. A Japanese post-war report<sup>9</sup> gave the losses as: sunk—transport *Yokohama Maru*, gunboat *Kongo Maru* and minelayer *Tenyo Maru*; damaged

<sup>8</sup> *Anderson*, *Hammann*, *Hughes*, *Sims*, US destroyers (1939), 1,570 tons, four 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. *Sims* sunk in Battle of Coral Sea, 7 May 1942; *Hammann* sunk in Battle of Midway, 6 Jun 1942.

<sup>9</sup> "Eastern New Guinea Invasion Operations", Monograph No. 96.

—destroyers *Yunagi* and *Asanagi*, gunboat *Kokai Maru*, seaplane tender *Kiyokawa Maru*, light cruiser *Yubari*, minelayer *Tsugaru* and minesweeper *Tama Maru*; with naval casualties totalling 126 killed and 240 wounded. The Japanese report also made optimistic claims as to losses they inflicted on the attackers, stating that aircraft from the seaplane tender *Kiyokawa Maru* shot down eleven American aircraft, though "fighters from the 24th Air Flotilla did not arrive at Lae until it was all over".

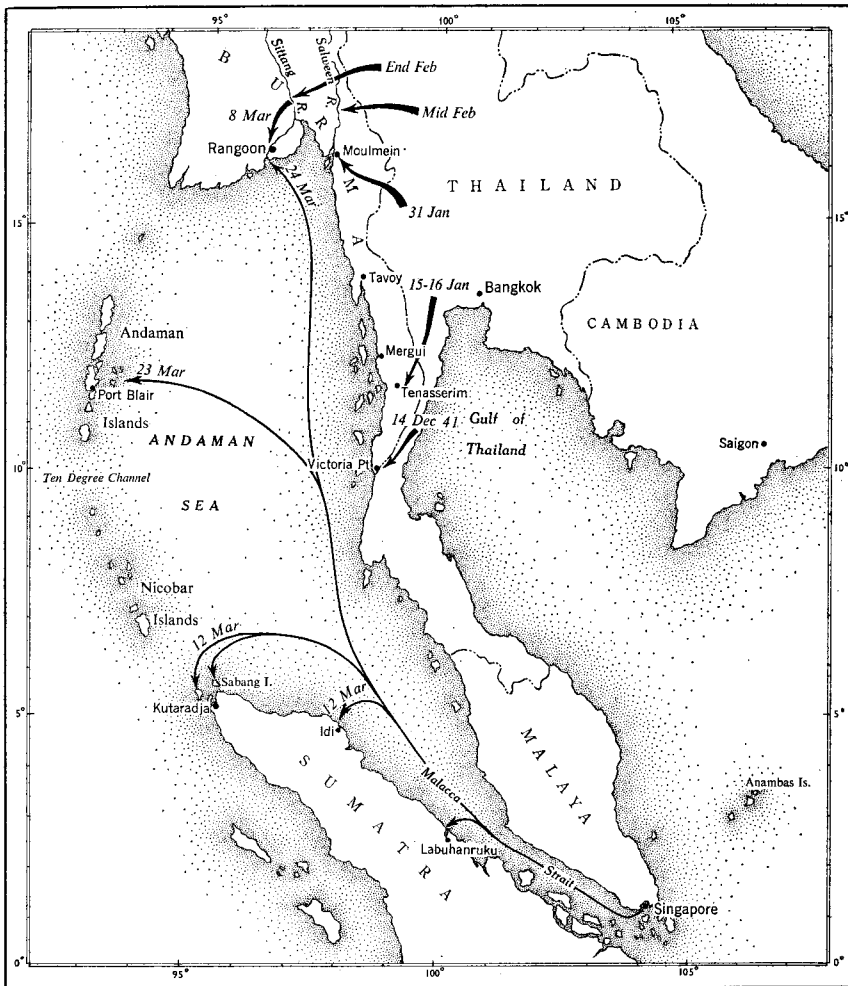
After the operation the striking force rendezvoused with Crace, and then returned to Pearl Harbour, where it arrived on 26th March. Crace's force, now reverted to "Anzac Force" and its original strength of *Australia*, *Chicago*, and two destroyers, U.S. Ships *Perkins* and *Lamson*, reached Noumea on 16th March, four days after the arrival of Convoy ZK.7 with the Americal Division. The day before Anzac Force arrived, H.M.N.Z. cruisers *Achilles* and *Leander* reached Noumea from Brisbane, as did *Westralia* from Melbourne. On the 16th *Westralia*, carrying two companies of the 182nd Regiment and a platoon of engineers from the Americal Division, sailed from Noumea, escorted by *Achilles*, for Efate Island in the New Hebrides, where they arrived on 18th March. These troops at once began to clear a 4,000-foot air strip in the jungle, and fighters commenced operating therefrom early in April. *Westralia* returned to Australia via Suva, and *Achilles* to Noumea, where she and *Leander* joined Crace's flag.

#### IV

Meanwhile the Japanese extended their territorial holdings in the west. With their subjugation of Thailand in December they lost no time in attacking Burma, and on the 15th of that month advanced to Victoria Point, southernmost boundary between Burma and Thailand. Rangoon suffered heavy air raids on 23rd and 25th December, and thereafter was under constant air attack which greatly reduced its value as a port. The full-scale invasion of Burma started on the night of 15th-16th January, when the enemy moved major land forces against Tenasserim, and the British withdrew from Tavoy and Mergui. At the end of January the Japanese occupied Moulmein, by mid-February they crossed the Salween River, and before the end of the month they had driven the defenders across the Sittang River and were pressing on Pegu in a direct threat to Rangoon. Motor launches and small craft of the Royal Burma Navy and Royal Indian Navy did good work withdrawing civil and service people from the islands of the Mergui Archipelago from Moulmein and Tavoy, and later, under the direction of Commodore Burma Coast,<sup>1</sup> from the Irrawaddy Delta. Normal life in Rangoon ceased on 1st March, but military convoys continued to reach there until the 5th, on which day General Alexander took command of the army in Burma. At midnight on the 6th the decision was taken to abandon Rangoon. Convoys making

<sup>1</sup> Cosmo Graham, who the year before had directed the naval operations against Persia when Senior Naval Officer Persian Gulf (Snopgee), assumed the Burma Coast command on 14th February 1942.





Japanese western advances, March 1942

for the port were turned back, demolitions of docks and oil refineries were carried out, some 3,500 refugees were withdrawn by sea in small craft under the escort of the sloop H.M.I.S. *Hindustan* and the U.S. destroyer *Allen*,<sup>2</sup> and the army fought a retiring action north-westwards to Tharrawaddy (65 miles from Rangoon) on the first stage of a northward retreat.

The Japanese entered Rangoon on 8th March. That evening an enemy naval force left Singapore, escorting four transports with assault troops for northern Sumatra, to extend the flank protection for the Burma operations. Close escort was provided by the light cruisers *Kashii* and *Yura*

<sup>2</sup> *Allen*, US destroyer (1917), 920 tons, four 4-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 30 kts.

and seven destroyers.<sup>3</sup> The *7th Cruiser Squadron*, *Chokai*, *Kumano*, *Suzuya*, *Mikuma* and *Mogami*, with four destroyers<sup>4</sup> and the seaplane tender *Sora Maru*, covered the operation from the Nicobar Islands area. The main occupation force in 10 transports left Singapore on 9th and 10th March, and landings took place on the island of Sabang, and at Kutaradja, Idi and Labuhanruku on the north and north-east coasts of Sumatra, at dawn on the 12th. The naval forces were back at Singapore by the 15th.

On the day of the enemy landings on Sumatra, the small British garrison at Port Blair, in the Andaman Islands, was withdrawn in the transport *Neuralia*. Port Blair was first bombed by Japanese aircraft on 24th February, and thereafter there were frequent reconnaissances over the islands, and it was clear that they must soon fall to the Japanese who did, in fact, occupy Port Blair on 23rd March. Next day their first army convoy arrived in Rangoon from Singapore. From then on transports arrived regularly, and the invasion of Burma was pushed forward with vigour.

This westward penetration by the Japanese increased their facilities for attacking Allied sea communications in the Bay of Bengal, and constituted a threat to Ceylon and the east coast of India. The importance of securing naval command of the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal, and of Ceylon as the base for the Eastern Fleet, had lain heavily with Mr Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff. The Eastern Fleet, still in process of formation and at best an ill-balanced force lacking in tactical exercising, was materially inferior to what the Japanese could oppose to it. Adequate bases were lacking. Trincomalee was little more than a fleet anchorage, and Colombo had no capital ship dock. Addu Atoll, a deep water lagoon ringed by coral islets at the southern end of the Maldive Islands and some 600 miles south-west of Ceylon, was developed as a makeshift fleet base, with an airfield and auxiliaries of a fleet train; and there were minor bases at Diego Garcia in the Chagos Archipelago farther to the south, and, to the westward, in the Seychelles and Mauritius. Ceylon was regarded by the authorities at Whitehall as the keystone of naval strength in the Indian Ocean, and on 27th March Churchill, in a note to the Chiefs of Staff Committee, emphasised the importance of the defences of Colombo: "Nothing must be taken from Ceylon which endangers the naval base or deters the Fleet from using it."<sup>5</sup> What he described as "energetic and almost frantic efforts" were made to reinforce Ceylon. The 16th and 17th Brigades of the 6th Australian Division were, at the suggestion of the Australian Government, held there on their way home from the Middle East; the 16th Brigade of the 70th British Division, on its way to India, was diverted there; and the aircraft carrier *Indomitable* was employed ferrying aircraft to the island. This diversion of strength caused concern

<sup>3</sup> *Kawauchi*, *Yugiri*, *Amagiri*, *Asagiri*, *Uranami*, *Isonami* and *Ayanami*.

<sup>4</sup> *Hatsuyuki*, *Fubuki*, *Shirakumo* and *Matsakumo*.

<sup>5</sup> W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol IV (1951), p. 156.

to General Wavell, the Commander-in-Chief, India, who on 7th March in a cabled appreciation to the Chiefs of Staff suggested that if the Japanese had command of the sea and air around Ceylon, an additional brigade would be of no avail to secure the naval bases, which the Japanese could "destroy without landing, in the same manner as at Pearl Harbour or Manila"; and that the troops could be better employed in India. He remarked, too, that Ceylon was the only portion of his command which had any scale of air protection. The British War Cabinet, however, ruled that the defence of the naval bases in Ceylon must have priority.<sup>6</sup> The importance attaching to this was underlined by the fact that on 10th March Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet, pending the arrival of Admiral Sir James Somerville, assumed command of the island as Commander-in-Chief, Ceylon, with all naval, military, air and civil authorities in the area, including the Governor and the Civil Administration, subject to his direction. Eight days later the Maldiv Islands were included in the command.

On 24th March, the day after the Japanese landed in the Andamans, Admiral Somerville arrived at Colombo in *Formidable*, and he assumed command of the Eastern Fleet with his flag in *Warspite*, at 8 a.m. on the 26th, with Rear-Admiral Danckwerts<sup>7</sup> as his Chief of Staff, and Rear-Admiral Boyd<sup>8</sup> as Rear-Admiral Aircraft Carriers, flying his flag in *Indomitable*. On 28th March Somerville sent a telegram of greetings to Admiral Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief U.S. Pacific Fleet, in which he said: "My fleet consists for the greater part of ships that have been employed almost exclusively on independent duties or are newly commissioned. I am engaged in giving them intensive fleet training and hope before long to report them as fit for offensive operations." He was given little time, for that same day he received a report that a Japanese force intended to attack Ceylon by air about 1st April.

## V

During the first and second weeks in March, the two Japanese forces commanded by Vice-Admirals Kondo and Nagumo, returned to Staring Bay, Celebes, after "mopping up" operations south of Java. At Staring Bay they refuelled, refreshed and reorganised, and on the 26th March Nagumo sailed with a powerful striking force comprising the aircraft carriers, *Akagi*, *Zuikaku*, *Shokaku*, *Soryu* and *Hiryu*; the battleships *Kirishima*, *Hiyei*, *Haruna* and *Kongo* of the 3rd Battle Squadron; the 8th Cruiser Squadron, *Tone*, *Chikuma*; and the 1st Destroyer Squadron, light

<sup>6</sup> Wavell, despatch, *Operations in Eastern Theatre, Based on India, from March 1942 to December 31, 1942*.

<sup>7</sup> Vice-Adm V. H. Danckwerts, CMG; RN. (1914-18: HMS *Kent*.) Director of Plans, Admiralty, 1938-40; Chief of Staff to C-in-C Eastern Fleet 1942; Deputy C-in-C Eastern Fleet 1942-44. Died 1 Mar 1944.

<sup>8</sup> Admiral Sir Denis Boyd, KCB, CBE, DSC; RN. (1914-18: HMS *Fearless*.) Capt HMS *Illustrious* 1940; comdg Mediterranean aircraft carriers, 1941; Rear-Adm aircraft carriers Eastern Fleet 1942; Fifth Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Air Equipment 1943-45; Admiral (Air) 1945-46. B. 6 Mar 1891. Died 21 Jan 1965.

cruiser *Abukuma*, and eight destroyers.<sup>9</sup> Nagumo entered the Indian Ocean with the main objective of destroying British naval and air forces in the Ceylon area, and thus safeguarding Japanese seaborne operations against Burma. Coincidental with the activities of the main force, a group consisting of the aircraft carrier *Ryujo*, with the 4th Cruiser Squadron, *Chokai*, *Atago*, *Takao*, and *Maya*; the 7th Cruiser Squadron, *Suzuya*, *Kumano* and light cruiser *Yura* with four destroyers,<sup>1</sup> under Rear-Admiral Kurita, concentrated on disrupting British lines of communication in the Bay of Bengal.

There was a subsidiary objective. The political atmosphere in India, long troubled over the question of independence, worsened with the western advance of the Japanese. A powerful and vocal body of opinion supporting Mahatma Gandhi sought India's neutrality and her release from British connections on the grounds that this would remove any motive the Japanese might have for the country's invasion. Hindu leaders in Congress called for recognition of India's sovereign status and the formation of an All-India National Government. On the other hand, Moslem leaders—representing about 100 million Moslems—opposed any proposal which they believed would hand over all power to a Hindu All-India Government, and reminded the British Government of its Declaration of 8th August 1940, which promised no constitutional change without Moslem agreement. There were other stresses and strains.

The general situation was such that the British Government could not embark on a constitutional experiment in Indian independence which would have meant the abandonment of British responsibility and the desertion of the Indian peoples (of whom some 2,500,000 volunteered to serve in the forces, and did so in many theatres) and of British defenders in India. It would, in Churchill's words, have been a betrayal of the Indian peoples and the British soldiers in India "by allowing their base of operations and the gallant Indian Army fighting at their side to disintegrate into a welter of chattering politics and bloody ruin".<sup>2</sup> In an endeavour to stabilise the Indian situation, the British Government sent Sir Stafford Cripps, Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons, to India with British proposals which had been drafted by a special Parliamentary Committee of which he had been a member. These proposals were, in essence, that the British Government undertook to grant full independence to India if demanded by a Constituent Assembly after the war. Sir Stafford Cripps reached Delhi on 22nd March, four days before Nagumo sailed from Staring Bay. It was a Japanese aim that politically Nagumo's operations in the Bay of Bengal area might embarrass the Cripps negotiations<sup>3</sup> and by adding to internal unrest in India, confine British military strength

<sup>9</sup> *Tankikaze*, *Urakaze*, *Isokaze*, *Hamakaze*, *Shiranuhi*, *Kasumi*, *Kagero* and *Arare*.

<sup>1</sup> *Yugiri*, *Asagiri*, *Amagiri* and *Shirakumo*.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, Vol IV, p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> The mission failed. Sir Stafford Cripps left Delhi for England on 12th April, and a fortnight later the All-India Congress Committee met and confirmed that it was impossible "for Congress to consider any schemes or proposals which retain even a partial measure of British control in India".

there and thus contribute towards German-Italian operations in North Africa. It was also felt that Japanese weight added to that of the German submarine campaign then being conducted successfully, might possibly bring about the collapse of Allied shipping strength.

This Japanese thrust into the Indian Ocean came at a time when there was considerable confusion and congestion in the ports throughout that area, caused by the additional traffic they were called upon to handle as a result of diversions from the Mediterranean route to the Middle East, and by the flow of reinforcements to the Eastern war theatre; and now greatly aggravated by the crowding into them of vessels escaped from the ABDA Area and Burma. In the Middle East necessity had mothered the development of an efficient decentralisation plan and of alternative ports to cope with traffic beyond the capacity of the old established ports, or to deputise for them if the changing military situation temporarily prohibited their use. Thus ports had been constructed, or enlarged and developed, in the Canal and the Suez neighbourhood, and in the Red Sea south at Safaga and Port Sudan, and also at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba,<sup>4</sup> so the congestion and the hold-up of ships were obviated. But in the Indian Ocean, where the need had seemed less urgent (and where, as in the case of South Africa, the imposing of the necessary controls could only result through protracted negotiations with an independent government) there had been no timely introduction of such a plan. In October 1941 the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic, reported that it was "nothing unusual to have twenty to twenty-five ships anchored outside Durban, and a dozen in Table Bay, awaiting berths". By May and June 1942 78 ocean-going ships on an average were lying idle in and outside South African ports.<sup>5</sup> Similar conditions obtained in India and Ceylon, and in March 1942 Bombay, Calcutta, and Colombo all reported congestion. There were, in the first months of 1942, regularly between 100 and 110 vessels in Colombo Harbour although official berthing capacity only allowed for 45. Ships were forced to make use of double, and sometimes triple berthing.

When Admiral Somerville received the report of the impending Japanese attack on Ceylon, his fleet was dispersed. He himself, with *Warspite*, *Formidable*, cruisers *Cornwall*, *Enterprise*, *Dragon*, *Caledon*, and six destroyers, was in Colombo, where also was the heavy cruiser *Dorsetshire*, undergoing refit. Vice-Admiral Willis<sup>6</sup> 3rd Battle Squadron, *Resolution* (flag), *Revenge*, *Ramillies* and *Royal Sovereign*, with *Indomitable*, and the

<sup>4</sup> C. B. A. Behrens, *Merchant Shipping and the Demands of War* (1955), a volume in the United Kingdom Civil Series, *History of the Second World War*, pp. 257-63. Behrens states that it was estimated that the cargo-handling capacity of the ports in the Canal and in the Red Sea as far south as Safaga (i.e. excluding Port Sudan) had been increased from the pre-war figure of 54,000 tons weight a month to 594,000 tons weight a month by the end of 1942.

<sup>5</sup> Behrens, p. 260.

<sup>6</sup> Admiral of Fleet Sir Algernon Willis, GCB, KBE, DSO; RN. (1914-19: HMS's *Fearless* and *Wallace*). Chief of Staff Mediterranean Fleet, HMS *Warspite* 1939-41; C-in-C African Station 1941-42; Vice-Adm Second-in-Comd Eastern Fleet 1942-43; Flag Offr Comd Force H Mediterranean 1943-44; C-in-C Levant Station 1943; Second Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Personnel 1944-46. B. 17 May 1889.

destroyers of the 7th Flotilla, H.M.A. Ships *Napier*, *Nizam*, *Norman*,<sup>7</sup> H.M. Ships *Fortune*, *Foxhound*, *Griffin*, *Decoy*, and the Dutch *Isaac Sweers*,<sup>8</sup> was based on Addu Atoll and exercising in that vicinity. The small aircraft carrier *Hermes*, with the destroyer H.M.A.S. *Vampire*, was in Trincomalee.

Somerville estimated that the Japanese approach to Ceylon would be from the south-east, and he accordingly sailed his scattered forces to concentrate on the evening of 31st March in 4 degrees 40 minutes north, 81 degrees east, 80 miles S.S.E. from Dondra Head, the southern point of Ceylon. Meanwhile, on 30th March, Admiral Layton in Colombo cleared that port of all ships, both inside and outside the harbour, which showed no immediate prospect of working cargo. They were dispersed to various anchorages round the southern coast of India. There remained in Colombo 21 merchant ships, 8 fleet auxiliaries, and 5 naval vessels, including the armed merchant cruiser *Hector*<sup>9</sup> and the destroyer *Tenedos*.

For three days and two nights the Fleet operated off the south coast of Ceylon, spending the time in much-needed fleet exercises, without any further Intelligence of the Japanese. (On 31st March an enemy force comprising three light cruisers, four destroyers and two transports made an unopposed landing at Flying Fish Cove, Christmas Island.) By 2nd April Somerville's old "R"-class battleships, designed for operations in the North Sea over short distances, and not modernised, were running short of fresh water, and at 9 p.m. that day the Commander-in-Chief shaped course for Addu Atoll after dispatching *Dorsetshire* and *Cornwall* to Colombo, *Dorsetshire* to resume her interrupted refit and *Cornwall* to escort Convoy SU.4 (the American transport *Holbrook* and the Australian *Duntroon*) to Australia; and H.M.S. *Hermes* and H.M.A.S. *Vampire* to Trincomalee to prepare for participation in a forthcoming operation against Diego Suarez, Madagascar. Somerville reached Addu Atoll on the 4th, and started to water and fuel. At 4 p.m. a Catalina reconnaissance aircraft from Colombo reported a large enemy force 360 miles S.E. of Ceylon, steering north-west. Before it could report the composition of the force it was shot down.

Admiral Somerville at Addu Atoll appreciated that the enemy's intention would be a dawn air attack on Colombo and Trincomalee, followed by a retirement to the eastward after he had recovered his aircraft. Somerville accordingly instructed *Dorsetshire* and *Cornwall* to sail from Colombo forthwith and join him in a position south-west of Ceylon, and, leaving Admiral Willis and the 3rd Battle Squadron (Force "B") to follow him

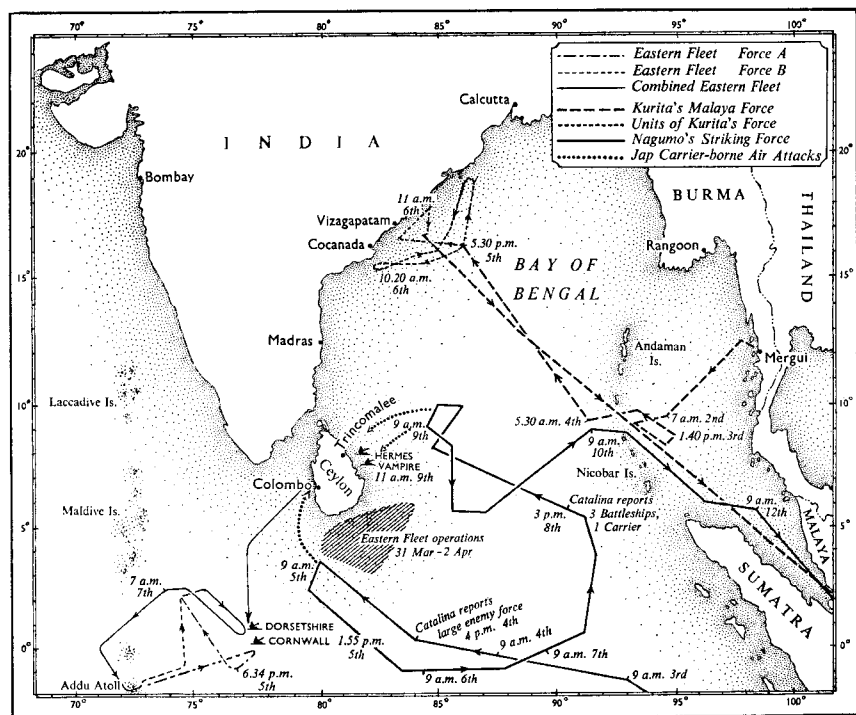
<sup>7</sup> HMAS *Norman*, fourth of the "N" class destroyers to be taken over by the RAN, was commissioned on 15th September 1941 under the command of Commander H. M. Burrell, RAN. Her first operation after "working up" was to carry to Archangel the British Trade Union Delegation to Russia, headed by Sir Walter Citrine, and thence to return them to Britain. She then proceeded to join the Eastern Fleet, entered the Indian Ocean in February 1942, and arrived at Addu Atoll on 26th February.

<sup>8</sup> *Isaac Sweers*, Dutch destroyer (1940), 1,628 tons, five 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 36 kts. Sunk off Algeria, 13 Nov 1942.

<sup>9</sup> HMS *Hector*, armed merchant cruiser (1924), 11,198 tons. Sunk in air raid on Colombo, 5 Apr 1942.

as soon as ready, he sailed that night with Force "A"—*Warspite* (flag), *Indomitable*, *Formidable*, *Emerald*, *Enterprise*, *Napier*, *Nizam*, *Nestor*, and three R.N. destroyers.

Through the night, and over a smooth sea, Force "A" steamed eastwards at 19 knots with the intention of intercepting the enemy force. But contact was not made, and just before 8 o'clock on Easter Sunday morning, 5th April, Colombo reported being under air attack. This attack, which



Japanese incursion into Bay of Bengal, April 1942

achieved relatively little, thanks to the dispersal of the ships from Colombo and the readiness of the defenders, cost the Japanese heavily. It was delivered by about 50 navy Type-99 bombers escorted by Zero fighters, in low- and high-level bombing of the harbour and installations, and a high-level attack—which did negligible damage—on the Ratmalana airfield. Colombo had no operable radar units but was well served by two reconnaissance Catalina aircraft which gave timely warning, and the enemy aircraft were met by 36 Hurricane fighters of Nos. 30 and 258 Squadrons, and six Fulmar fighters of the Fleet Air Arm. Eighteen Japanese aircraft were shot down for the loss of 15 Hurricanes and four Fulmars, and

another five enemy aircraft were claimed by the anti-aircraft batteries.<sup>1</sup> Two ships were sunk in the harbour—H.M. Ships *Hector* and *Tenedos*—and one merchant ship was hit and set on fire. The most serious damage was that done to the harbour workshops. The raid ended at 9 a.m.

At that time *Dorsetshire* and *Cornwall*, a little over 100 miles south of Colombo, were hastening southwards at 27½ knots over a calm sea to join Force "A", then about 300 miles south-west of them and steering north-easterly. Some 300 miles to the north-east of Force "A", and about 100 miles east of the cruisers, was Nagumo's striking force, whose carriers were waiting to fly on the aircraft returning from Colombo. That done Nagumo, instead of retiring to the eastward as anticipated by Somerville, pressed on to the north-west in search of the Eastern Fleet. It was a morning in which, despite the calm weather and high visibility, the two main forces sought vainly for each other. At intervals Somerville received reports of enemy formations of heavy ships, but failed to make contact nor, though radar in Force "A" showed frequent traces of enemy air reconnaissance, was he himself sighted. Nagumo was too far to the north for each to find the other, but at 1 p.m., when the two cruisers were in 2 degrees 12 minutes north, 77 degrees 47 minutes east, about 220 miles from Colombo, *Cornwall* sighted two enemy reconnaissance aircraft which shadowed them. Forty minutes later the dive bombers arrived, and within little more than a quarter of an hour first *Dorsetshire* and then *Cornwall* were sunk in a series of fierce attacks by waves of dive-bombing aircraft.

Force "A" was then about 90 miles to the south-west. News of the enemy aircraft shadowing the cruisers had been received in a garbled signal by Force "A", where apprehension as to the cruisers' safety was roused by subsequent wireless silence, and heightened about 3 p.m. by an intercepted wireless message from a reconnaissance aircraft reporting wreckage and a large number of survivors in the sea in the approximate position of the cruisers. This news, coupled with the numerous reports he was receiving of powerful enemy surface groups, brought home to the Commander-in-Chief that he was opposed by an enemy much superior in strength, and he decided to turn back and concentrate with Force "B". The junction was effected early next morning, the 6th, when the combined fleet turned eastward again.

Meanwhile, Admiral Layton in Colombo, with the more accurate assessment of Nagumo's strength provided by the reports of his shore-based reconnaissance aircraft, and with knowledge of Rear-Admiral Kurita's force in the Bay of Bengal, made a signal to the Admiralty emphasising the heavy odds against Somerville and the danger facing the Eastern Fleet

<sup>1</sup> Denis Richards and Hilary St G. Saunders, *The Fight Avails* (1954), p. 72, a volume in the official series *Royal Air Force 1939-1945*. Another British official report (1954) states that "at least 19 Japanese aircraft were brought down by the fighters plus five shot down by AA", and gave British losses as 16 shot down in combat, two Catalinas in reconnaissance and six Swordfish on passage Trincomalee-Colombo. On the other hand, S. W. Roskill, the British official naval historian, in *The War at Sea*, Vol II (1956), p. 28, says: "At the time we believed that the defending fighters had inflicted heavy losses on the Japanese carrier planes, especially over Colombo; but it is now plain that the claims were greatly exaggerated. According to Japanese records the whole operation only cost them seventeen aircraft."



of "immediate annihilation",<sup>2</sup> and thus simultaneously informed them and Somerville of the hazardous situation of the Eastern Fleet. Both Admiral and Admiralty decided that retirement westward was the only wise course. Before withdrawing, however, Somerville, sending the cruiser *Enterprise* and two destroyers on ahead to start rescue operations, succoured the survivors of *Dorsetshire* and *Cornwall*. After spending 30 hours in the water, 1,122 officers and men were rescued. Twenty-nine officers and 395 ratings lost their lives.

On the night of the 6th the Fleet turned westward, and on the morning of the 8th reached Addu Atoll. Here, after a conference that afternoon, Admiral Somerville told his flag and commanding officers that he was convinced of the undesirability of further operations in Ceylon waters in the face of such superior Japanese strength, and in conditions in which the battle fleet, lacking speed, endurance, and gun power, was only a liability. He had decided to send the battle fleet to Kilindini, East Africa, where it could protect Middle East and Persian Gulf communications and do some collective training. He himself, with Force "A"—*Warspite* and the carriers—would temporarily base on Bombay with the object of deterring the Japanese from attacking Indian Ocean communications; but for the immediate future would avoid Ceylon. In London, the authorities had also reached the conclusion that the battle fleet must "get out of danger at the earliest moment", and Somerville's actions were "promptly approved by the Admiralty, whose thoughts in the grave events of the past few days had followed almost identical lines".<sup>3</sup>

## VI

In the late afternoon of Easter Monday, 14th April 1941, the British hospital ship *Vita* had sailed from Tobruk with Australian and British wounded soldiers on board. Outside the harbour she was attacked by eight or ten German dive bombers, and was quickly helpless with her engine room flooded to sea level. Fortunately two ships of the 10th Destroyer Flotilla, the Australians *Waterhen* and *Vendetta*, were near by, and hastened to her assistance, and around midnight that night, by the light of candles in the immobilised hospital ship, her 430 patients and medical staff were transferred to *Waterhen*, which carried them safely to Alexandria. Subsequently *Vita* was made sufficiently seaworthy to enable her to reach Bombay for full-scale repairs. Now, on Easter Monday, 6th April 1942, fresh from the Bombay yards with her repairs completed, she was at Trincomalee, her new base. There, on 8th April, she received orders to sail for Addu Atoll, to embark the injured survivors from *Cornwall* and *Dorsetshire*.

That same afternoon sailing orders went out to other ships in Trincomalee. About 3 p.m. a Catalina reconnaissance aircraft reported a Japanese force of three battleships and one aircraft carrier east of

<sup>2</sup> Russell Grenfell, *Main Fleet to Singapore* (1951), p. 171.

<sup>3</sup> Churchill, Vol IV, pp. 160-1.

Ceylon steering N. by W. This report indicated to Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Arbuthnot, Commander-in-Chief East Indies, that a dawn raid on either Trincomalee or Madras was to be expected,<sup>4</sup> and in view of the success of the dispersal tactics followed at Colombo, he at once instructed the Flag-Officer-in-Charge, Trincomalee (Rear-Admiral A. F. E. Palliser, who had assumed that appointment on 26th March), to clear the harbour. That night ships including the aircraft carrier *Hermes* (with only one aircraft on board, and that damaged), H.M.A.S. *Vampire*, the minelayer *Teviot Bank*, the tanker *British Sergeant* (5,868 tons), Royal Fleet auxiliaries *Pearleaf* (5,911 tons) and *Athelstane* (5,571 tons), and the corvette *Hollyhock*, were sailed southwards with orders to keep close inshore and to be at least 40 miles from Trincomalee by dawn on the 9th. Dispersal to the southwards was chosen because the Colombo dispersal had been to the northward and there were 22 merchant ships—an attractive target for enemy aircraft—sheltering in Palk Strait between Ceylon and India.

The expected Japanese air raid took place on Trincomalee at 7 a.m. on 9th April. Warning of the enemy approach was given by radar, and 17 Hurricane fighters of No. 261 Squadron R.A.F., and six Fulmar aircraft of No. 873 Squadron (which had been landed from *Hermes*) intercepted and took a considerable toll of the enemy. The Japanese force of about 55 bombers and 40 to 50 fighters, flying at 15,000 feet, heavily bombed the China Bay airfield and the dockyard, causing major damage. Thirteen Fleet Arm aircraft under erection or repair were destroyed, and the monitor *Erebus*<sup>5</sup> slightly damaged and the merchant ship *Sagaing* (7,958 tons) set on fire and beached. Fifteen Japanese aircraft were shot down by defending fighters for the loss of eight Hurricanes and three Fulmars, and another nine were destroyed by anti-aircraft fire. A striking force of nine Blenheim aircraft of No. 11 Squadron R.A.F. sighted a Japanese force of three battleships, four or five carriers and four or five cruisers with destroyers, and attacked from 11,000 feet against heavy opposition, apparently without damaging the enemy ships. Five of the attackers and four defending aircraft were destroyed, and the four remaining Blenheims were damaged and unserviceable.

When the raid on Trincomalee developed, *Hermes* and *Vampire* were 65 miles to the south, about five miles off shore; and when the raid ended they altered course to the northward again to return to Trincomalee that afternoon. At 8.55 a.m. they were sighted by a reconnaissance aircraft from the battleship *Haruna*, and within five minutes the aircraft's sighting report had been intercepted and read at Colombo, and passed to Rear-Admiral Palliser, and to *Hermes*, with instructions to *Hermes* to proceed with dispatch to Trincomalee, where she could get fighter protection, and

<sup>4</sup> Arbuthnot, in his report (dated 4th June 1942) on the loss of *Hermes* and *Vampire*, gave the enemy sighting at 3 p.m. on 8th April, as 9° 18' N, 84° 40' E, about 240 miles east of Trincomalee. C-in-C Eastern Fleet, in his "Proceedings", noted an enemy sighting of three battleships and one carrier at 3.17 p.m. in 6° 10' N, 85° 49' E—about 480 miles ESE of Trincomalee.

<sup>5</sup> HMS *Erebus*, monitor (1916), 7,200 tons, two 15-in guns, 12 kts.

also saying that fighters were being sent to her at once from Ratmalana. Unfortunately, owing to a breakdown in communications, these aircraft did not arrive in time to be of any help. At 9.45 a.m. Nagumo's carriers flew off a force of 85 bombers and nine fighters. Three-quarters of an hour later, off Batticaloa light, the south-bound *Vita* met the north-bound *Hermes* and *Vampire* just as the first of the Japanese bombers arrived on the scene. They disregarded the hospital ship and attacked *Hermes* at 10.35 in waves of dive-bombing which quickly secured hits, and within ten minutes the aircraft carrier suffered 40 direct hits and capsized and sank. Sixteen bombers then made for *Vampire*. Two near-misses shook the ship badly, and she was then stopped by a direct hit in the boiler room. Four hits followed in quick succession, and *Vampire*'s captain, Commander W. T. A. Moran, R.A.N., ordered "abandon ship". Floats and rafts were launched when another hit broke the ship's back. The bow sank quickly, and the stern, which floated for some time, followed at 11.2 a.m. after a heavy explosion, presumably of the magazine. According to a post-war Japanese report, *Vampire* was attacked with sixteen 250-kilogramme bombs, thirteen of which were direct hits. Between them *Hermes* and *Vampire* accounted for four enemy aircraft.

Meanwhile *Vita* steamed to the position of *Hermes*, whose survivors were scattered over an area of three or four square miles, lowered lifeboats and the motor-boat, and began rescue operations. Later the motor-boat, with a lifeboat in tow, was sent to rescue survivors from *Vampire*. *Vita* could not herself go on that errand because, as her master, Captain R. D. C. Sinclair, later reported, "so many of the *Hermes* survivors were still in the water alongside the ship and round my propellers".<sup>6</sup> Commander Moran, who was last seen on the bridge of *Vampire*, was lost with the ship, and seven ratings also lost their lives.<sup>7</sup> The commanding officer of *Hermes*, Captain R. F. J. Onslow, R.N., with 18 of his officers and 288 ratings, was lost in that ship. Of the survivors from both vessels, 590 were rescued by *Vita* and landed at Colombo that evening, and some others were picked up by local craft or swam ashore.

Simultaneously with the attack on *Hermes* and *Vampire*, six dive bombers attacked the tanker *British Sergeant* about 15 miles to the northward. She was left in a sinking condition and foundered off Elephant Point—where her crew landed in boats—some two hours and a half later. About an hour after these attacks, *Hollyhock* and *Athelstane*, 30 miles south of Batticaloa, were sunk by nine enemy aircraft. All of *Athelstane*'s complement survived, but the corvette lost 53, including the commanding officer.

While Nagumo's main force was thus occupied off Ceylon, Kurita's group of *Ryujo* and cruisers did considerable damage in the Bay of Bengal between 5th and 9th April. With the threat of air attack on the

<sup>6</sup> H. St G. Saunders, *Valiant Voyaging* (1948), p. 133.

<sup>7</sup> The ratings were: Chief Stoker R. E. Lord, Stoker PO J. V. A. Carey, PO R. A. H. McDonald, Stoker PO L. A. Gyss, Stoker G. H. Williams, Stoker J. H. Hill, and Signalman A. S. Shaw, RN.

port it was decided on 31st March to clear ships from Calcutta, and in the absence of escort vessels these were sailed in small unescorted groups routed as close inshore as possible.<sup>8</sup> From among these ships Kurita's aircraft and surface vessels took a heavy toll of 20 vessels, and, during the same period, Japanese submarines sank three ships and damaged one off the west coasts of India and Ceylon.<sup>9</sup> In all, during those early days of April 1942, the Japanese sank 34 ships around India, aggregating some 151,000 tons. Kurita's aircraft also raided Vizagapatam (the first bombs on Indian soil) and Cocanada, on 6th April, causing a panic there and elsewhere on the eastern coast of India. "This," later wrote the then Commander-in-Chief, India, "was India's most dangerous hour; our Eastern Fleet was powerless to protect Ceylon or Eastern India; our air strength was negligible; and it was becoming increasingly obvious that our small tired force in Burma was unlikely to be able to hold the enemy, while the absence of communications between Assam and Upper Burma made it impossible to reinforce it."<sup>11</sup>

Circumstances now, however, forced the Japanese naval forces to withdraw. According to a post-war Japanese report, Nagumo decided to retire because (a) he had exterminated the greater part of British surface power in the Bay of Bengal; (b) he had destroyed half of the air strength in Ceylon; (c) India could not be regarded as a dangerous source of attack in the absence of heavy bombing squadrons there; and (d) the British showed no positive inclination to fight. "Consequently it was recognised that the first phase of the objectives of these operations had been successfully accomplished." But there were other reasons. His force was running short of fuel, and, in spite of its success it had not escaped considerable losses in its aircraft and among its skilled and experienced pilots. These losses probably exceeded to a large extent those—totalling 47 aircraft and their crews—claimed as certainties in the attacks on Colombo and Trincomalee, and those shot down in the enemy attacks on the British warships. They were certainly sufficiently large to necessitate the withdrawal of the aircraft carriers to Japan for refit and for replenishment of aircraft and pilots in readiness for other operations. According to Japanese post-war testimony the calibre of the replacements was inferior to that of the replaced.<sup>2</sup>

On 14th April (about which time Nagumo's force returned to Japan) the German ambassador in Tokyo telegraphed to his Foreign Minister,

<sup>8</sup> Merchant ship movements at Calcutta during April 1942 were: arrivals—103,278 tons; departures—469,940 tons. (RIN War Diary, April 1942.)

<sup>9</sup> Kurita's force sank: *Gandara* (5,281 tons); *Malda* (9,066); *Dardanus* (7,726 tons); *Sinkiang* (2,646); *Silksworth* (4,921); *Selma City* (5,686 tons); *Van de Capellan* (2,073 tons); *Harpasa* (5,082 tons); *Dagfred* (4,434 tons); *Hermod* (1,515 tons); *Ganges* (6,246 tons); *Bienville* (5,491 tons); *Batavia* (1,279 tons); *Banjoewangi* (1,279 tons); *Taksang* (3,471 tons); *Exmoor* (4,999 tons); *Autolycus* (7,621 tons); *Indora* (6,622 tons); *Shinkiang* (2,441 tons); and *Elsa* (5,381 tons). The submarines sank *Fultala* (5,051 tons); *Bahadur* (5,424 tons); *Washingtonian* (6,617 tons).

<sup>11</sup> Wavell, despatch, *Operations in Eastern Theatre, Based on India, from March 1942 to December 31, 1942*, para 5.

<sup>2</sup> S. E. Morison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific* (1948), p. 386, Vol III in the series *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*. Japanese losses of naval aircraft from 8th December 1941 to 30th April 1942 totalled 855—315 in combat and 540 operationally.

Ribbentrop, the results of an interview he had with the Japanese Foreign Minister, Togo. Discussing future operational targets of the Japanese High Command, Togo told him that though the Japanese operations in the Indian Ocean had been partly aimed at influencing the course of the Cripps negotiations in India, at the same time they would eventually affect the western part of the Indian Ocean so that Japanese conduct of the war would correspond with the German desire for a Japanese advance in the Indian Ocean towards the Middle East. The ambassador gained the impression that Japan's next conquests would be Ceylon and the Indian Ocean.

But by this time the Japanese decision had been reached to transfer major activities to the east. The main military object of the penetration of the Bay of Bengal had been to support the Japanese landings in the Andamans and Burma areas. These were successfully accomplished and now, "although the punitive campaign for the Philippines and western New Guinea had not been completed, on 10th April 1942 the order was issued for the distribution of the strength of the Combined Fleet for the second stage of the operation. Through this order, the Commander-in-Chief of the Second Fleet, who had been in charge of directing southern operations in general, was released, and, at the same time, the main points of Japanese naval strength, which had been placed in the southern area, were now transferred to the eastern front."<sup>3</sup>

This redistribution of Japan's naval strength resulted from Admiral Yamamoto's success in securing—against strong opposition led by Air Staff officers—Imperial Headquarters' approval of his plan to thrust eastwards towards Midway and Hawaii and a final reckoning with the U.S. Pacific Fleet. Details of this plan were carried to Tokyo from the Japanese battleship *Yamato* in Hiroshima Bay by Commander Yasuji Watanabe on 2nd April. Territorially the plan aimed at securing Midway Island and the western Aleutians. It was to be the second stage in an operation whose first was the capture of Port Moresby, and whose ultimate object was to establish a new eastern outer defence perimeter running from Kiska in the Aleutians, via Midway, Wake, the Marshall and Gilbert Islands, Samoa, Fiji, to New Caledonia. But the important point about this second stage was that Midway Island was of such value to the Americans as their westernmost Pacific base and "sentry to Hawaii" that a threat to it would force the Pacific Fleet out in its defence to a position where it could be destroyed by more powerful Japanese air and surface forces. This, Yamamoto held, was essential to that swift victory which was the only alternative to Japan's ultimate defeat.

The plan was, however, bitterly opposed by Commander Mitsushiro, Senior Air Staff Officer at Imperial Headquarters. He argued that the proposed operation would entail an engagement with American land-based and fleet-arm aircraft; that the Japanese air force could not destroy or immobilise the U.S. air force on Hawaii, no matter how much the Pacific

<sup>3</sup> "Naval Operations in the Southern Area, 1942-1945"; ATIS document "Japanese Studies in World War II", No. 29.

Fleet was weakened; that it was doubtful whether a Japanese landing force on Midway could be adequately supplied; and that it was certain that Japanese air force reconnaissance from Midway could not undertake the task of effectively watching, day and night, perhaps for months, the counter moves of American task forces or aircraft. He appealed to Watanabe to persuade his Commander-in-Chief to strike south rather than east, and claimed that the capture of Samoa would be comparatively simple as any fighting would be from island to island, and cooperation of land-based aircraft could be organised; and he pointed out that the resultant straddling of Pacific communications and isolation of Australia would force the U.S. Pacific Fleet to battle and thus meet that important condition of Yamamoto's policy.

For three days the acrimonious discussions continued. Yamamoto had a powerful argument on his side in the American carrier raids of February and March against the Marshalls, Wake Island, Marcus Island and New Guinea, and remained obdurate on board his flagship, directing Watanabe—in response to a direct telephone call from his representative—to stand by the dictum:

In the last analysis, the success or failure of our entire strategy in the Pacific will be determined by whether or not we succeed in destroying the U.S. Fleet, more particularly its carrier task forces. The Naval General Staff advocates severing the supply line between the U.S. and Australia. It would seek to do this by placing certain areas under Japanese control, but the most direct and effective way to achieve this objective is to destroy the enemy's carrier forces, without which the supply line could not in any case be maintained. We believe that by launching the proposed operation against Midway, we can succeed in drawing out the enemy's carrier strength and destroying it in decisive battle. If, on the other hand, the enemy should avoid our challenge, we shall still realise an important gain by advancing our defensive perimeter to Midway and the western Aleutians without obstruction.

Finally, Commander Watanabe carried back to Hiroshima from Imperial Headquarters a reluctant approval of the Midway plan.<sup>4</sup> A few days later a clinching argument supported the plan when an American force of 16 army medium bombers was flown off the aircraft carrier *Hornet* in the north Pacific 668 miles from Tokyo, and raided the Japanese capital at noon on 18th April 1942.

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<sup>4</sup> This account of the discussions leading to Midway is from one given by Commander Masatake Okumiya to Australian newspaper correspondent Richard Hughes, in May 1950; and from *Midway* (1955) written by Okumiya and Mitsuo Fuchida in collaboration. Okumiya was present at Japanese Imperial Headquarters as an observer at the time of the discussions.

## CHAPTER 2

### JAPAN'S FIRST CHECK—CORAL SEA

THE months of May and June 1942 were of moment in the Second World War. Each of the protagonists faced grave issues which, in the period, moved surely towards their resolution in the outcome of the struggle for control of the world's sea communications. With the progress of the war, the German Naval Staff lost none of its appreciation of the significance of this struggle, nor of the fact that on its decision hung their hopes of victory over Germany's deadliest and most dangerous enemy.<sup>1</sup> From the outbreak of war in 1939, Raeder was importunate in pressing upon Hitler the necessity ceaselessly to attack Britain on the seas, and everywhere to harass her communications and circumvent her aims. He and the Naval Staff saw clearly the implications not only of the threat to Britain of the severance or choking of her home island communications, but of the threat to Germany from British control of strategic sea areas.

They had, however, been unable to persuade Hitler against the deflection of Germany's war effort away from her main enemy to that fatal wandering in the Russian vastnesses which was as destructive of German hopes as Napoleon's similar venture had been ruinous of those of France 129 years earlier.<sup>2</sup> From the time Hitler launched his attack against Russia, he became more and more hopelessly enmeshed in the net of a war economy increasingly inadequate to meet the demands made upon it. He learned with intensifying severity the lesson which, by mid-1942, was being learned by the Italians and Japanese also in the hard school of day-to-day experience that:

the needs of sea power are not confined to the number of fighting ships in existence and readiness at the beginning of a war, but also to an extensive and efficient ship-building industry, fully provided with the raw materials of its work both to replace losses and to meet the demands upon sea power which invariably and inevitably increase as war proceeds.<sup>3</sup>

From the moment Hitler became obsessed with the idea of the Russian operations ("it is necessary to eliminate at all cost the last enemy remaining on the Continent", he told Raeder in reply to the admiral's request for an accelerated submarine-building program in December 1940), the shadow of the Russian Campaign, with its rapacious appetite for men and

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<sup>1</sup> In December 1939 the German Naval Staff drew up a proclamation which they desired Hitler to issue. It began: "England is our deadly enemy. Her object is the destruction of the German Reich and the German people. Her methods are not open warfare, but vile and brutal starvation, in fact extermination of the weak and defenceless not only in Germany but in the whole of Europe. History proves this. . . . We Germans will not allow ourselves to be starved out, nor will we capitulate. Returning like for like, we will make Britain herself feel what it means to be besieged, in order to free the world once and for all from the base and insufferable tyranny of the British." The proclamation was, in fact, never made. *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 30 Dec 1939.

<sup>2</sup> The outcome of the war could well have been different had the Allied High Commands allowed themselves similarly to have been deflected from the "Beat Hitler First" concept.

<sup>3</sup> Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power* (1946), p. 157.

materials, gloomed over the German war at sea, time and again nullifying the plans and aspirations of the German Naval Staff. In the first half of 1942 the Axis Powers were no nearer the solution of the Mediterranean, African, and Middle East problems; and Germany, with a total fleet of 285 submarines, had a record of submarine construction at the rate of 10.5 boats a month from the outbreak of war in 1939<sup>4</sup>—a production figure which, in September 1939, Raeder had told Hitler was short to the extent of at least 15 boats a month.

Yet 1942, and especially the first half, was a good year for the German submarine, and on 14th May Doenitz, Commanding Admiral Submarines, told Hitler that he did not believe that the race between the enemy ship-building program (enhanced as that was by American production) and submarine sinkings was in any way hopeless, and that “we”, meaning Germany, Italy, Japan: submarines, air forces, surface vessels and mines”, were already sinking the 700,000 gross registered tons monthly of Allied and neutral shipping which, he calculated, was necessary to offset new construction.

Allied losses in the first half of 1942 did approximate to that monthly figure. British losses alone in the first three months of the year were double what they had been in the last quarter of 1941, and “for the first time in the war the British-controlled merchant fleet began steadily to diminish”.<sup>5</sup> In the first six months of 1942 Allied and neutral merchant shipping losses from all forms of enemy action, and in all theatres, totalled 898 vessels of 4,147,406 gross tons—a monthly figure of 691,234 tons. Of this total, German submarines accounted for 582 ships of an aggregate of 3,080,934 tons, a monthly average of 513,489 tons. For the month of June, the submarines’ bag was the highest—144 ships of 700,235 tons.

It looked then as though Doenitz had sound reasons for optimism. At this period new boats were commissioning in greater numbers; the introduction in April of fuel tanker submarines (“milch cows”) to supply boats in operational areas greatly extended the endurance of the smaller boats, enabling them to operate for two weeks in the Gulf of Mexico and off Panama, or as far away as the Cameroons and Bahia; he had new types of boats, capable of operating as far afield as the Indian Ocean, shortly coming forward; and new and improved armament in view. “The submarine forces,” he told Hitler, “have faith in their equipment and believe in their fighting ability.”

In May 1942 the German Naval Staff was also hopeful of decisive naval action in the Mediterranean, where the British Mediterranean Fleet was at a low ebb. Hitherto German participation there had been limited to the support of the Italian effort, but now large-scale operations entailing

<sup>4</sup> As at April 1942, the German submarine figures were: submarine fleet at 1st September 1939—57, of which 48 were operational, and 9 in dockyard hands; commissioned September 1939–April 1942—305, a total of 362, reduced to 285 by the loss of 77 boats during the period. According to an Australian Navy Office report, the Germans had 86 operational submarines in commission on 31st December 1941. Of these 15 were in the Mediterranean or assigned to that area, and 28 were in dockyard hands or in port.

<sup>5</sup> Behrens, *Merchant Shipping and the Demands of War*, p. 263.



joint responsibility were envisaged—the complete reconquest of Cyrenaica, including the capture of Tobruk, and the occupation of Malta, as a prelude to the invasion of Egypt and the “Great Plan” of the link up with the Japanese in the Middle East. It had originally been planned that the capture of Malta must precede the attack in North Africa, but in April Rommel changed his mind regarding this, as he judged that the British in the desert would be much stronger after May and that therefore he could not defer his own attack until after the assault on Malta. Field Marshal Kesselring, Commander-in-Chief, South, agreed with this view because of the success of his air attacks on Malta, and from then on the plans for the attack on Tobruk took precedence over those for the Malta assault. On 1st May, at a meeting between Hitler and Mussolini at Berchtesgaden, Hitler made it clear that the attack in the desert should take place at the end of May or early June, and the assault on Malta in July. The reconquest of Cyrenaica was estimated to require about six weeks, and for the subsequent Malta operation a special Italo-German staff was set up in Rome, the first time complete joint staff work was achieved by the Axis partners in the Mediterranean. The Germans were to contribute parachute and airborne troops, army and engineer units, etc.; the Italians the naval forces.<sup>6</sup> Cooperation by the Japanese in naval activity in the western Indian Ocean was sought.

As stated above, the Japanese had indicated their intention of operating against Allied merchant ships in the Indian Ocean, with both submarines and surface raiders. But their concept of submarine warfare differed markedly from the German. Doenitz summarised the German concept when he told Hitler that the aim of U-boat war was “to sink as many enemy ships as possible, no matter where, with the smallest losses possible. U-boat war is a race with merchant ship construction.”<sup>7</sup> The German Naval Ministry instructed their Naval Attaché at Tokyo to make every effort to induce the Japanese to adopt this principle—“notes were repeatedly exchanged between my office and Berlin on this subject and directives from home instructed me to press the matter further”<sup>8</sup>—but the Japanese argued that naval vessels represented the real power against which they fought, and hence were the one logical target. They adopted this policy (strongly advocated by Admiral Suetsugu, Supreme War Councillor, a former submarine squadron commander, and Commander-in-Chief Combined Fleet in 1933) in an attempt to overcome the disparity in capital ships and aircraft carriers imposed upon them by the 5:5:3 ratio laid down in the Washington Naval Treaty. Under this policy the submarine fleet was to be used primarily for attacking enemy naval forces, the targets in order of priority to be aircraft carriers, then battleships, and other naval craft. Training was directed to this end, and it was hoped that the submarine would prove a decisive weapon in a war of attrition against

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<sup>6</sup> Vice-Admiral E. Weichold, C-in-C Mediterranean, in post-war “Essays”.

<sup>7</sup> Vice-Admiral K. Assmann, *Headline Diary*, 14 May 1942.

<sup>8</sup> Vice-Admiral P. H. Weneker, former German Naval Attaché, Tokyo, in a post-war statement.

the American fleet as it moved westward across the Pacific from Hawaii. Merchant ships were to be a secondary consideration, only to be targets for attack when naval targets were lacking. Throughout the war the Japanese concentrated on the destruction of commerce only when the fighting strength of the fleet permitted.

The Japanese Navy expected much from its submarines, and for this reason alone both officers and men were carefully selected and put through most rigorous training. They considered themselves superior in technique in the field of submarine warfare to any in other navies. But when it came to the test of actual warfare "the results were deplorable".

This failure was attributed to:

our inferiority in the fields of ordnance and ship construction. Our submarines, built and equipped with inferior weapons, were counter-attacked by the enemy before they ever got to their targets, or were evaded.<sup>9</sup>

It will be recalled<sup>1</sup> that at the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, submarines of the Advance Expeditionary Force—five of them (the only boats then so-equipped) carrying midget submarines of the *Special Naval Attack Unit*—were used in a manner conformable to this concept of submarine warfare, and the pattern was repeated. After Pearl Harbour the *8th Submarine Squadron* was formed under the command of Rear-Admiral Ishizaki. Originally of eight boats—*I 18*, *I 20*, *I 21*, *I 22*, *I 24*, *I 27*, *I 29* and *I 30*—five of which were equipped with midget submarines, it carried out training in preparation for a second period of special operations. As a preliminary to such operations in Australasian waters the submarine *I 25*, equipped with a small one-man seaplane with a speed of 90 knots and a three-hour operating period, sailed from Kwajalein on 8th February 1942.<sup>2</sup> During the next two months her aircraft flew over Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart, Wellington, Auckland and Suva on reconnaissance flights.<sup>3</sup> It was portion of the *8th Squadron*—*I 18*, *I 20*, *I 30*, with the addition of *I 10*<sup>4</sup> and *I 16*—which sortied into the Indian Ocean from Penang at the end of April, with Ishizaki in command and *I 10* as his flagship. This boat, and *I 30*, were equipped with float-planes, and the other three carried midget submarines. During May, *I 30*'s aircraft reconnoitred Aden (7th), Jibuti (8th), Zanzibar and Dar-es-Salaam (19th); and it was also reported that on the 20th *I 10*'s aircraft reconnoitred Durban, off which port, because of harbour congestion, an average of more

<sup>9</sup> Vice-Admiral Fukudome, former Chief of Staff of Combined Fleet, in a "conclusion" to *Sunk* (1954) by Lieut-Commander Mochitsura Hashimoto.

<sup>1</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942* (1958), p. 471, Vol I in this series.

<sup>2</sup> To the existing fleet of 63 (6 of which were old, non-operational training boats) the Japanese added 116 wartime-built submarines. A total of 130 was lost between December 1941 and August 1945. *I 18*, *I 20*, *I 22* and *I 24* belonged to the *I 16*-class, constructed pre-war, of 2,556 tons surface and 3,564 tons submerged displacement; one 5.5-in gun; eight 21-in torpedo tubes; surface speed of 23.6 knots; equipped to carry a midget submarine. *I 21*, *I 25*, *I 27*, *I 29* and *I 30* were of the *I 15*-class. Of 2,581 tons surface and 3,653 tons submerged, their surface speed was 23.6 knots. They mounted one 5.5-in gun, six 21-in torpedo tubes. They were equipped to carry a seaplane. There were minor differences among Japanese boats of both classes. All ten boats were sunk before the end of 1944.

<sup>3</sup> Hashimoto, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> *I 10*, Japanese submarine, 2,200 tons, one 5.5-in gun, one aircraft, 18 kts. Sunk north of Tru 4 Jul 1944.

than 30 ships a day were lying at anchor during this period. But Ishizaki, true to the Japanese policy, was looking for naval game. Meanwhile, acting as supply ships for the submarines, and seeking merchant ship victims on their own account, two Japanese armed merchant cruisers, *Aikoku Maru* and *Hokoku Maru*, operated in the Indian Ocean, and on 9th May captured the Dutch tanker *Genota* (7,937 tons) some 1,600 miles south of Ceylon.

Such assistance as the Germans were getting in the Indian Ocean, both to support their projected drive in the Mediterranean and their over-all submarine warfare, was not, then, very great at this stage. Moreover, the figures of Allied losses at sea in the first half of 1942, encouraging though they were to the Germans, were to an extent deceptive in that the "all forms of enemy action" figure of around 700,000 tons monthly quoted by Doenitz, included the heavy losses in the South-West Pacific and Bay of Bengal in February, March and April; and the submarine figures were unduly swelled by heavy losses in the American eastern coastal areas and adjacent zones—Canadian Coastal Zone, Eastern Sea Frontier, Caribbean Sea Frontier, Gulf Sea Frontier, Bermuda Area and Panama Sea Frontier (Atlantic). These losses resulted from the Germans' quickness to take advantage of American unpreparedness in these areas in the six months immediately following the entry into the war of the United States. The U.S. Navy's inexperience, and failure to benefit from the hardly-won knowledge and tried anti-submarine methods of the British, proved costly in that period, during which losses by submarine action in these American zones reached the figure of 2,182,969 gross tons—more than half of the total of Allied and neutral losses, and more than three-fifths of the total tonnage sunk by German submarines. Discussing this the U.S. naval historian said that

this unpreparedness was largely the Navy's own fault. . . . In the end the Navy met the challenge, applied its energy and intelligence, came through magnificently and won; but this does not alter the fact that it had no plans ready for a reasonable protection to shipping when the submarines struck, and was unable to improvise them for several months.<sup>5</sup>

This is the more difficult to understand in that for sixteen months before America entered the war, the U.S. Navy had the benefit of Britain's growing experience in the U-boat campaign. Ever since the arrival in London in August 1940 of the U.S. Naval Mission headed by Rear-Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, it had been fed with information described by Ghormley to the authorities in Washington as "fresh from the laboratory of war, of priceless value to national defence". Yet it was April 1942 before coastal convoys were introduced by the U.S. Navy, with some help from the British in the provision of 10 corvettes, and 24 armed trawlers, for escort purposes. Although on 19th March the First Sea Lord told Admiral King that he regarded the introduction of convoys as a matter of urgency, and that convoys with weak escorts were preferable to no

<sup>5</sup> S. E. Morison, *The Battle of the Atlantic* (1948), pp. 200-1, Vol I in the series.

convoys, King replied that he considered inadequately escorted convoys were worse than none—"the exact opposite", recorded the British naval historian, "to all that our experience had taught".<sup>6</sup>

## II

The first half of 1942 thus brought compelling problems to all the protagonists. The Japanese were primarily concerned to consolidate their conquests in the Pacific and Indian Ocean areas, and firmly to entrench themselves behind an extended perimeter which they could hold until a peace favourable to them was achieved. A secondary and minor consideration was their westward essay into the Indian Ocean towards a possible physical link with the western Axis Powers. The Germans were pressed by the three vital matters of a speedy conclusion to the Russian campaign, an all-out effort in submarine warfare, and a successful drive eastward through the Mediterranean and Middle East. In Russia, where winter had laid a frozen, delaying hand on operations (though in the early months of 1942 the Russians kept up a shifting pressure along the line of front) Hitler, in a directive of 5th April, outlined plans "to wipe out the entire defence potential remaining to the Soviets and to cut them off as far as possible from their most important sources of supply". Great armies—German in the main, but with Italian, Rumanian, and Hungarian contingents—were assembled to strike the initial blows in May at the Crimea and Caucasus. On the seas, Doenitz was pressing for increased U-boat construction to prosecute the vital warfare against Allied communications. In the Mediterranean, Rommel, in North Africa, gathered strength with his German and Italian armies for his eastward drive. With Malta crushed to a condition of temporary impotence beneath the weight of air attacks (delivered from Sicily, where Kesselring had some 400 German and 200 Italian aircraft) and with the depleted Mediterranean Fleet unable to operate in the central Mediterranean, there was little to obstruct the flow of supplies and reinforcements to Rommel, and May 1942 saw the largest safe delivery during the whole campaign in one month of stores to the Axis North African armies—145,000 tons.

Apart from combating the German submarine campaign, by continually developing means of defence and attack, and by a swiftly growing production of new merchant tonnage, the three foremost problems confronting Britain and the United States were the stabilisation of the position in the Far East, the security of the Middle East, and the safeguarding of India and the Indian Ocean bases.

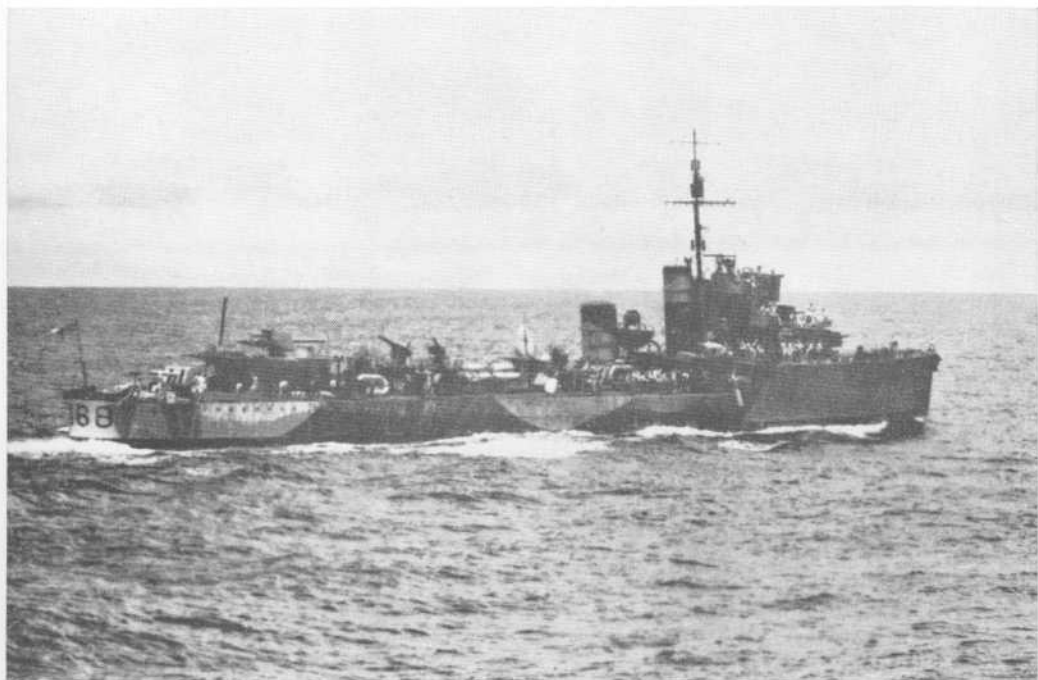
To meet the first of these, simultaneously with the reorganisation of spheres of responsibility and command, and the allotment of forces thereto in Japanese-controlled areas, similar developments were fructifying in those controlled by the Allies. On 14th March the American Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a limited deployment of American forces into the South-West Pacific, with the object of securing the Antipodes and putting

<sup>6</sup> Roskill, *The War at Sea*, Vol II, pp. 97 and 99.



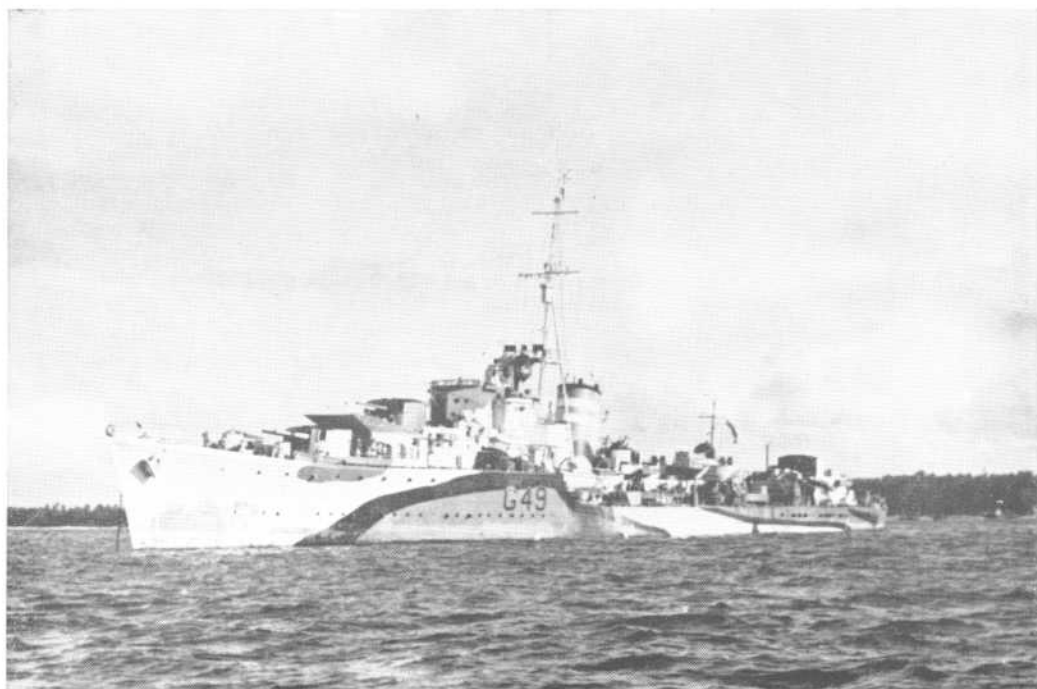
*(Department of Information)*

Admiral Sir Guy Royle, First Naval Member and Chief of Naval Staff, July 1941 to June 1945.



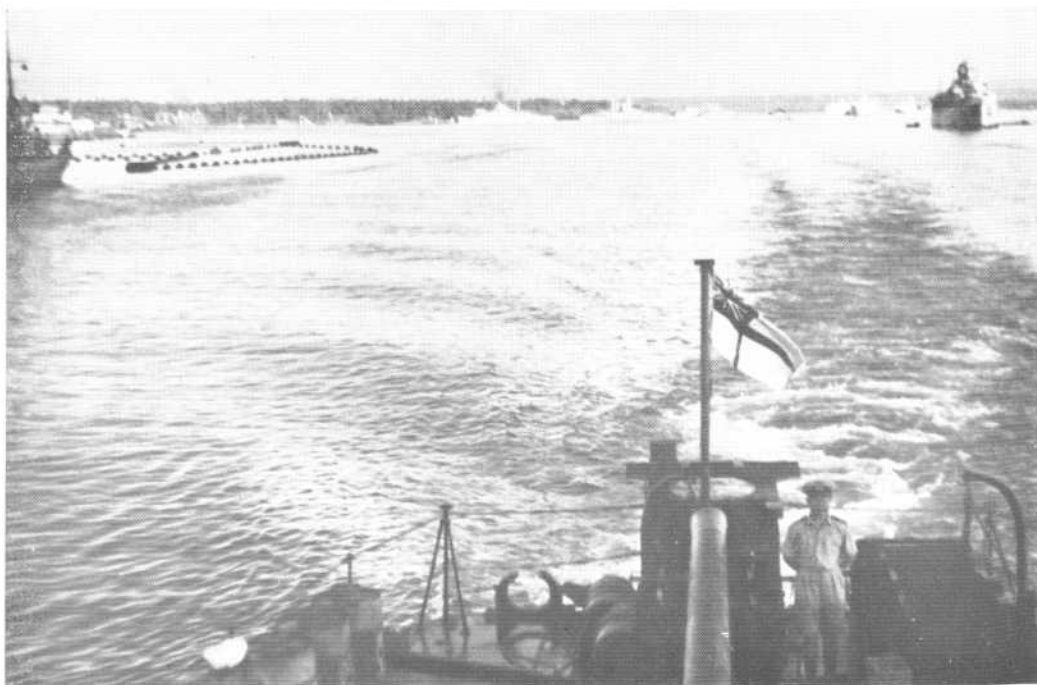
*(R.A.N. Historical Section)*

H.M.A.S. *Vampire*, 4th March 1942.



(Australian War Memorial)

H.M.A.S. *Norman* at Addu Atoll, the British Indian Ocean base, 1942.



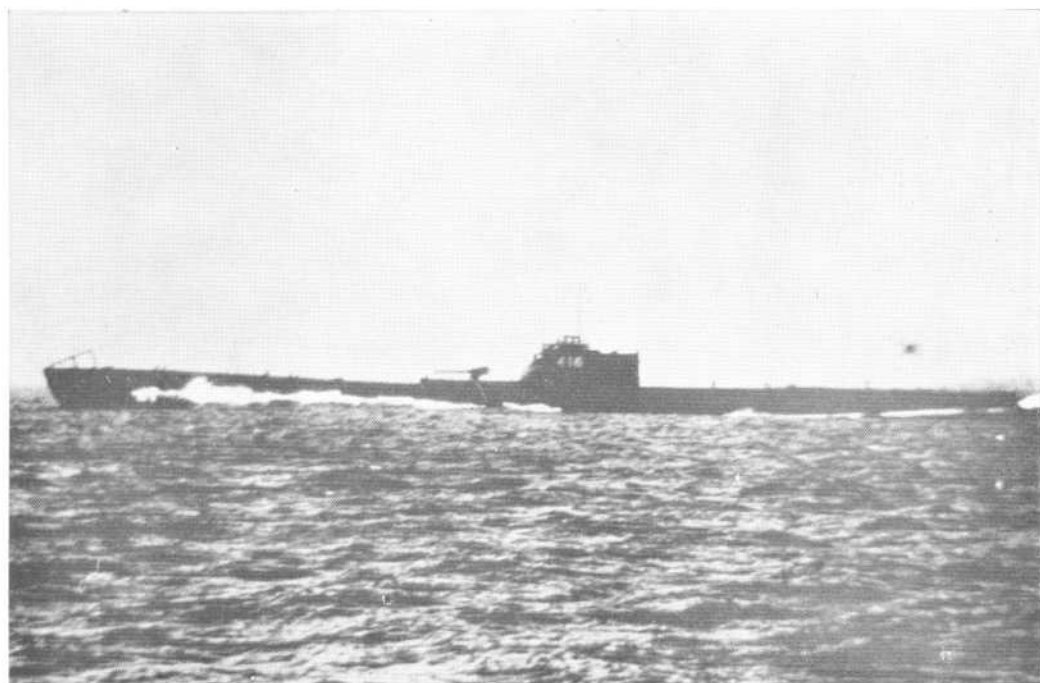
(R.A.N. Historical Section)

An Australian destroyer leaving Kilindini, the Indian Ocean East African base.



*(Australian War Memorial)*

The port of Colombo, the main British Indian Ocean base, with a ship burning in the harbour after the Japanese air attack on 9th April 1942. Photograph taken from H.M.A.T. *Duntroon*.



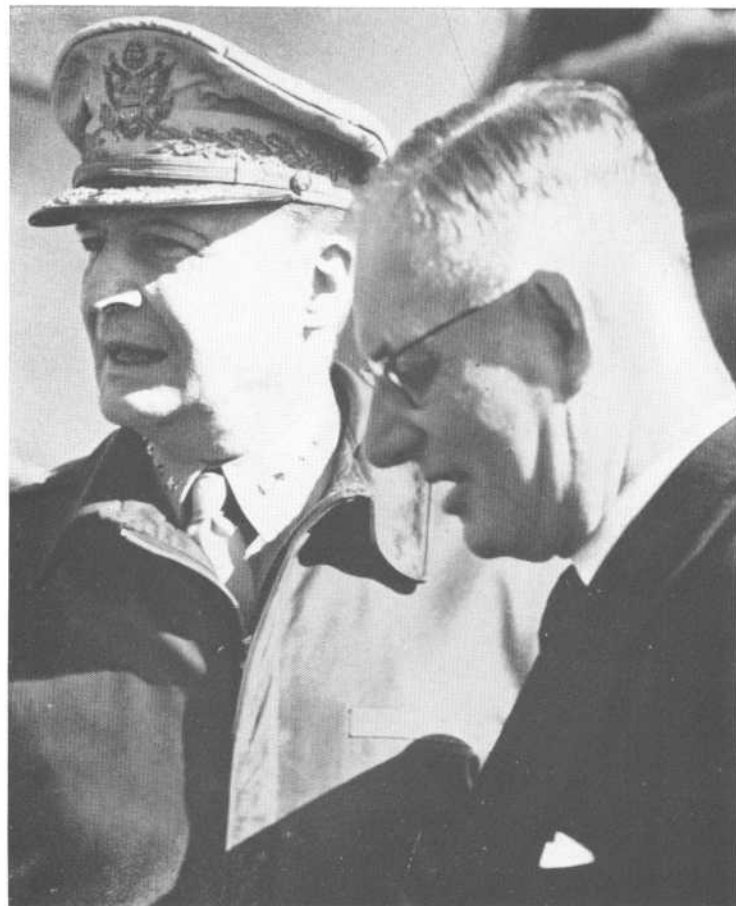
*(R.A.N. Historical Section)*

A Japanese I-class submarine.



*(U.S. Navy)*

Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief,  
United States Pacific Fleet.



*(Australian War Memorial)*

General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Allied Commander,  
South-West Pacific Area, with the Australian Prime Minister, John Curtin.



such pressure on Japan as to prevent any further westward or southward offensive on her part. They estimated that 416,000 United States troops would be required in overseas positions in the Pacific to secure Australia and New Zealand; 225,000 were already there or on the way. United States naval strength in the Pacific on 15th March 1942 (with expected additions during 1942 in parenthesis) was: battleships 7 (3); large carriers 5 (nil); escort carriers nil (10); heavy cruisers 13 (nil); light cruisers 12 (6); destroyers 92 (44); submarines 61 (13).<sup>7</sup>

It was three days later, on 17th March, that General Douglas MacArthur arrived in Australia from the Philippines, and the next day a statement announcing his appointment (by agreement between the Australian, United Kingdom, and United States Governments) as Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in the South-West Pacific was released by the Australian Prime Minister, Mr Curtin. On 26th March General MacArthur, accompanied by his Chief of Staff, Major-General Richard K. Sutherland, and Deputy Chief-of-Staff, Brigadier-General Richard J. Marshall, attended a meeting of the Advisory War Council, and outlined his views regarding the war situation generally, and in the Pacific particularly.

He expressed his personal doubts whether the Japanese would undertake an invasion of Australia "as the spoils were not sufficient to warrant the risk". He thought the main danger to Australia was from raids, and that the Japanese might also try to secure air bases in Australia. (This appreciation was very similar to that of the Australian Chiefs of Staff of 27th May 1939, at a time when the United Kingdom Government had given assurances of Britain's ability to send a fleet to Singapore, and of Singapore to hold out: "the scale of attack to be prepared for should be medium scale attacks, i.e. attacks on shipping combined with heavy raids on territory in the nature of a combined operation by naval, air, and land forces"; and to that of Commander Long, the Australian Director of Naval Intelligence, made on 9th December 1941—also while Singapore was still in being—that a direct attack against Australia and New Zealand was not likely, but that "it is . . . likely in view of Japan's present attack against Hawaii that raids will be made by heavier units [than submarines] against strategic coastal areas such as Newcastle. These attacks may take the form of shelling by a squadron of naval units or air attack from aircraft carriers".<sup>8</sup>) MacArthur emphasised that the provision of adequate anti-aircraft defences for the main cities and air stations was essential. He said that the Japanese were engaged "on one of the most audacious strategic conceptions the world had ever seen". They had thrown in all they had, and had over-extended themselves. They were gambling on gaining quick and decisive results while the democracies were still unprepared. The Allies should concentrate sufficient forces in the Pacific to strike a decisive blow in one place. To do this they must be prepared to take chances in other theatres.

<sup>7</sup> Morison, *Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions* (1949), pp. 247-8, Vol IV in the series.

<sup>8</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, pp. 42, 492.

In this initial discussion General MacArthur emphasised a point of view to which he was constantly to return in future talks with the Australian Government: that of the relative importance of the Pacific and European theatres in regard to the outcome of the war as a whole. The immediate issues in the European area, he said, would not be determined until the coming conflict between German and Russian forces was settled. The Allies were unable to send much help to Russia through the few routes open to them, and were lacking present resources to open up a second front in Europe. "The position in Europe could, therefore, be considered as temporarily stabilised for the next few months as far as the United States and the United Kingdom are concerned." This was not so in the Pacific, where he suggested the concentration of a combined United States-United Kingdom fleet to undertake offensive operations against Japan which might well prove decisive while the outcome of the German-Russian conflict remained in doubt. The organisation of such offensive operations depended primarily on the rapidity with which the United States could ship men and equipment to Australia, and shipping was the serious limiting factor. He urged Australia to stand firmly by its view that the Pacific was the predominant theatre.

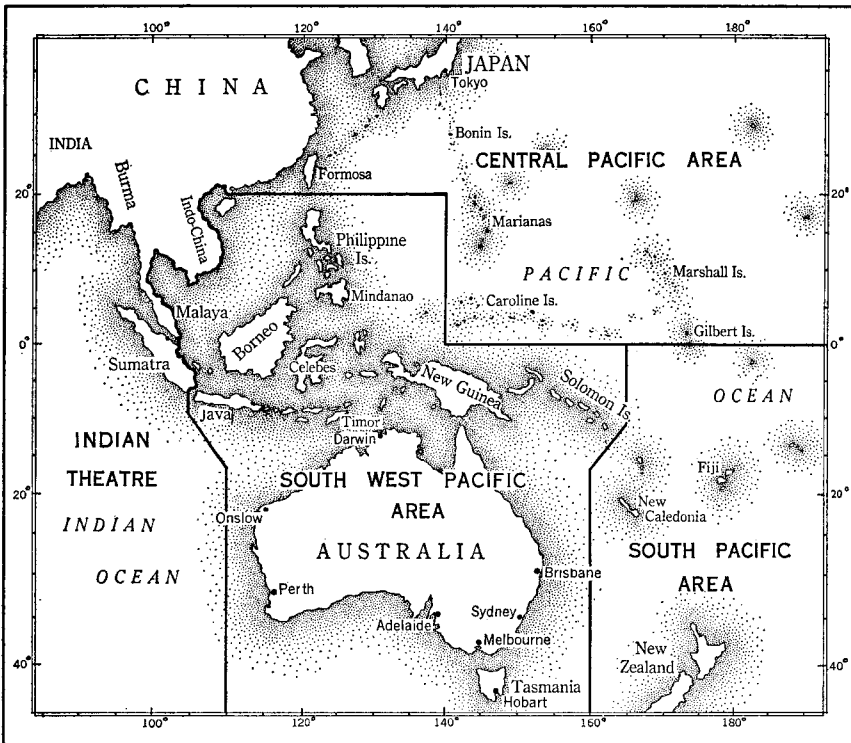
On 3rd April, with the concurrence of the Governments of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands, a Pacific Area and a South-West Pacific Area were defined by the American Joint Chiefs of Staff at Washington. The Pacific Area was subdivided into the North Pacific Area (north of 42 degrees north), the Central Pacific Area (between 42 degrees north and the equator) and the South Pacific Area, that lying south of the equator between the eastern boundary of the South-West Pacific Area<sup>9</sup> and longitude 110 degrees west. The western boundary of the South-West Pacific Area was the dividing line between the Indian and Pacific Theatres. Admiral Nimitz, U.S.N., was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Ocean Area, and General MacArthur Supreme Commander in the South-West Pacific. The directives issued to the two commanders outlined major tasks which in general ran parallel, allowing for the topographical differences between the areas. With those allotted to Nimitz in roman type and those to MacArthur in italic, they were:

- (a) Hold island positions between the United States and South-West Pacific Area necessary for the security of lines of communication and for supporting naval, air, and amphibious operations against the Japanese. *Hold key military regions of Australia as bases for future offensive action against Japan, and strive to check Japanese aggression in the S.W.P.A.*

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<sup>9</sup> The original boundaries of the South-West Pacific Area were: on the west from Cape Kami in the Luichow Peninsula around the coast of the Tonkin Gulf, Indo-China, Thailand, and Malaya to Singapore; from Singapore south to the north coast of Sumatra; thence round the east coast of Sumatra (leaving the Sunda Strait to the eastward of the line) to a point on the coast of Sumatra at longitude 104° east; thence south to latitude 8° south; thence south-easterly towards Onslow, Australia, and on reaching longitude 110° east, due south along that meridian. On the north and east from Cape Kami in the Luichow Peninsula south to latitude 20° north; thence east to longitude 130°, thence south to equator, along equator to longitude 165° east; thence to latitude 10° south; thence west to latitude 17° south longitude 160° east; thence south.

- (b) Support the operations of forces in the S.W.P.A. Check the enemy advance across Australia and its essential lines of communication by the destruction of enemy combatant, troop, and supply ships, aircraft, and bases in Eastern Malaysia and the New Guinea-Bismarck-Solomon Islands region.
- (c) Contain the Japanese forces within the Pacific Theatre. Exert economic pressure on the enemy by destroying vessels transporting raw materials from recently conquered territories to Japan.



South-West Pacific and Pacific Areas, April 1942

- (d) Support the defence of the Continent of North America. Maintain our position in the Philippine Islands.
- (e) Protect the essential sea and air communications. Protect land, sea and air communications within the S.W.P.A. and its close approaches.
- (f) Prepare for the execution of major amphibious offensives against positions held by Japan, the initial offensives to be launched from the South Pacific Area and S.W.P.A. Route shipping in the S.W.P.A.
- (g) Support operations of friendly forces in the Pacific Ocean Area and in the Indian Theatre.
- (h) Prepare to take the offensive.

Similarly, both commanders were told that the Combined Chiefs of Staff would exercise general jurisdiction over the grand strategic policy and over such related factors as were necessary for the proper implementa-

tion including the allocation of forces and war material; and that the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff would exercise jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to operational strategy. All instructions from them to Nimitz would be issued by or through the Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet (Admiral King); all those to MacArthur through the Chief of Staff of the Army (General George C. Marshall). This, as Dr Evatt (Minister for External Affairs), then in Washington, cabled to Mr Curtin on 3rd April, meant that in effect King and Marshall would control operational strategy. "I have no doubt that the areas will be adjusted as circumstances dictate. . . . Marshall and King explained to me that neither regards the hypothetical line of division as a fence."

These decisions regarding the Pacific areas were reached after heart-searching deliberations by the American Joint Chiefs of Staff in their efforts to meet situations of urgency which pressed upon the Allied Nations in every theatre and from every side. In their opinion the Allies "would constantly be on the verge of ultimate defeat during 1942". At this juncture their planning committee, as is recorded by the United States naval historian,<sup>10</sup> "even made the tentative suggestion to reevaluate the basic strategic concept of the war [the "Beat Hitler First" plan, which was confirmed in the agreement between Churchill and Roosevelt on 17th March 1942] if the British refused to launch a European offensive in 1942, 'in order to consider the possibility of concentrating U.S. offensive effort in the Pacific Area'." It was a theme (fraught with deadly danger for the Allies) to be played with increasing emphasis in the months ahead, both in the United States and in the Pacific Area.

Immediate results of the operational-area division of the Pacific, and of the directives to the area commanders (to which the Australian Government gave formal approval on 7th April) were the allocation of all combat sections of the Australian defence services to the South-West Pacific Area, and the notification to their commanders that, from midnight on Saturday, 18th April 1942, all orders and instructions issued by General MacArthur in conformity with his directive would be considered by them as emanating from the Australian Government. Four days later, on 22nd April, the Anzac Area ceased to exist. The Anzac Commander and Anzac Force were re-designated. Admiral Leary, formerly "Comanzac", now became Commander, South-West Pacific Forces, with the short title "Comsouwespac". The Anzac Squadron was reconstituted under the designation Task Force 44, comprising H.M.A. Ships *Australia* (flagship of Rear-Admiral Crace), *Canberra*, *Hobart*, and the U.S. Ships *Chicago* and *Perkins*.

The effect of Britain's provision of anti-submarine escort vessels to the United States was felt in this re-allocation of Australian naval forces in the South-West Pacific. In March 1942 the Admiralty considered the situation regarding escort vessels in the Indian Ocean and Anzac Areas respectively, both of which were suffering their share of the general shortage

<sup>10</sup> Morison, Vol IV, p. 247n.

which, at that period, amounted to 342 in British requirements of 725, and 468 in American requirements of 590.<sup>1</sup> The East Indies war diary for the month recorded "a source of anxiety" in the lack of anti-submarine vessels in the Persian Gulf, where only one was available, and where the first attack by a submarine on a merchant ship had been reported by s.s. *Jalayamuna* (4,981 tons) on 7th February; and that in the Indian Ocean the scarcity of escorts made it impossible to organise any regular scheme of convoys. Of Australia's shipbuilding program of 60 corvettes—36 on her own account, 20 for the Royal Navy, and four for the Royal Indian Navy—21 were completed: nine, eleven, and one respectively. It had been intended by the Admiralty that the 24 built on R.N. and R.I.N. account should be used in the Indian Ocean where, because of "(1) heavy U-boat concentrations in Atlantic focal areas and in the Mediterranean, and (2) the loan of 10 corvettes and 24 A/S trawlers to America" there was little to fall back on. However, "as Australia will probably be the jumping off place for the United Nations offensive against Japan" the Admiralty proposed to transfer seven R.N. corvettes to the Anzac Area, which would "according to our estimates mean that when all 60 [corvettes] are completed, 43 would be in the Anzac Area, 13 in the Indian Ocean (Imperial Account) plus four in the Indian Ocean (R.I.N. Account)". This was done, and of the seven Imperial Account ships concerned, five (H.M.A. Ships *Goulburn*, *Bendigo*, *Ballarat*, *Whyalla* and *Kalgoorlie*) were in the Anzac Area (later South-West Pacific Area) by April 1942, and the remaining two (*Broome* and *Pirie*) went there when they commissioned in July and October respectively.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile many of the balance of the Imperial Account ships served in the South-West Pacific Area throughout the greater part of 1942, and only three of them were on the East Indies Station before August.<sup>3</sup>

The deployment of land forces to the South-West Pacific, and the movements elsewhere of those necessary to ensure the security of the Middle East and of India and the Indian Ocean bases, placed a strain upon shipping which taxed the skill of the British in this field, and also ruffled the smooth relations between Britain and the United States because "almost from the start [of the Pacific War, at the time the needs of the British armies began rapidly to increase] the Americans built more dry-cargo ships than they lost, while the British meantime lost many more ships than they built; yet American net gains, which amounted to 1.2 million gross tons . . . in 1942, did not suffice to meet their expanding needs".<sup>4</sup>

This situation arose from a variety of causes, chief among which were the different natures of the British and American economies; the predominance of civil authority in Britain and of military authority in America

<sup>1</sup> Roskill, Vol II, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> HMAS's *Whyalla*, *Kalgoorlie*, *Broome*, *Pirie*, corvettes (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts. *Kalgoorlie* transferred to Royal Netherlands Navy in May 1946 and was renamed *Ternate*.

<sup>3</sup> These thirteen corvettes were: *Bathurst* and *Lismore* which went in 1941; and *Geraldton*, *Launceston*, *Burnie*, *Maryborough*, *Toowoomba*, *Wollongong*, *Ipswich*, *Cairns*, *Cessnock*, *Tamworth* and *Gawler* which left in 1942.

<sup>4</sup> Behrens, p. 284.

in shipping administration; the importance of the Commonwealth territories in the Allied war economy; and the dependence of those territories on the services of British ships. Overseas trade was all-important to the Commonwealth, in war as in peace; whereas seaborne imports were less vital to the United States. In Britain, civil authority controlled the operations of ships even when on military service carrying troops and supplies, while the U.S. War Department largely curbed the powers of that country's War Shipping Administration, so that "by the autumn of 1942, virtually all the United States ships taken since Pearl Harbour from civil employment, together with all the net gains from new building, had been appropriated by the United States Services". And the bulk of American shipping was being used in the Pacific.<sup>5</sup>

The security of the Middle East, and of India and Indian Ocean bases, made demands on shipping which had their reflections in the economies in all areas, particularly in countries on the periphery of the Indian Ocean area. The call upon motor transport (M.T.) ships was particularly heavy, for vehicles took shipping space out of all proportion to other military needs. Thus while the number of men carried in the U.K.-Middle East and Indian Ocean area convoys (the "WS" convoys, whose code initials were taken from the baptismal names of Britain's Prime Minister, and which were known in naval circles as "Winston's Specials") rose from a monthly rate of approximately 36,000 in the second half of 1941 to over 60,000 in the first half of 1942—an increase of about 60 per cent—the comparable increase in the movement of vehicles was around 72 per cent. The necessary readjustment of tonnage distribution had its effects on the economies of South Africa, India, New Zealand and Australia, which now found that the transport, vital to them, of important bulk cargoes and manufactured imports, were in jeopardy. It was at this juncture that the genius of the British in shipping matters proved itself, with "the arts of management, the result of inherited skill in commerce and government, and of a will that could move mountains, that saved the day".<sup>6</sup> The resulting achievement illustrated the mobility of resources conferred by sea power on its able user. The fruits which that mobility bore were nurtured by the skilful balance of military and economic needs, and the extraction of the greatest possible service from every ship. Thus Indian Ocean trade assumed a wartime pattern. Contacts with the outside world were maintained by military cargo ships; and trade within the area (Australia, for example, since the loss of Nauru and Ocean Islands had to get phosphates from the Red Sea) was conducted partly by ships that could not be used elsewhere and partly by means of military cargo ships which, before they returned to their base, were sent on cross voyages (i.e. between ports neither of which was the ship's base port) to meet current needs.

In straight-out trooping, the maximum service was wrung from the six "Monsters"—*Queen Mary*, *Queen Elizabeth*, *Aquitania*, *Mauretania*, *Ile*

<sup>5</sup> Behrens, p. 290.

<sup>6</sup> Behrens, p. 276.

*de France* and *Nieuw Amsterdam*; and this included increasing their troop-carrying capacity almost threefold. The two "Queens", when in the Indian Ocean "US" convoys before Pearl Harbour, carrying Australian and New Zealand troops to the Middle East, each accommodated about 6,000 men. At the beginning of 1942 this figure was raised to 10,500 each, and in June 1942, at the request of the Americans, whose troops they were then carrying, it was again raised, to approximately 15,000 each.<sup>7</sup> In the first half of 1942 these six ships moved thousands of men over long distances in world-wide dispositions. The two "Queens" were employed between Australia and the United States—*Queen Elizabeth* mostly in the Pacific; *Queen Mary* in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, New York-Middle East-Australia via the Cape; *Aquitania* spent the first four months ferrying between the United States and Hawaii—and in May and June trooped from the United Kingdom to Madagascar; *Mauretania*, *Ile de France* and *Nieuw Amsterdam* were engaged in Indian Ocean troop movements.

### III

In the second half of April the various aims of the protagonists were reflected in far-reaching plans. In the South-West Pacific Area the Japanese, having completed successfully their invasion operations in the Bismarck Archipelago and Bougainville, and on Australian New Guinea, felt ready to proceed with the next step in the extension of their eastern outer defence perimeter—the capture of Port Moresby. As early as the 17th of the month, largely as a result of eavesdropping on Japanese radio with hearing sharpened by the possession of the enemy's code secrets, the Americans were aware with considerable accuracy of the impending Japanese moves, and were able to make counter preparations. In the Indian Ocean the British were about to carry out the decision, reached the previous month, to capture Diego Suarez in Madagascar and thus deny to the Japanese this Vichy-held "key to the safety of the Indian Ocean".<sup>8</sup> By 22nd April the assault force and covering force for this operation (IRONCLAD) were assembled in Durban Harbour—a classic example, as the British naval historian recorded,<sup>9</sup> of a maritime concentration of ships brought briefly together from far-flung stations for a specific purpose. They comprised the battleship *Ramillies*, aircraft carrier *Illustrious*, cruisers *Devonshire* and *Hermione*, nine destroyers, corvettes and minesweepers, five assault ships, and M.T. and stores vessels, under Rear-Admiral E. N. Syfret as Combined Commander-in-Chief. Some 5,000 miles due north of Durban, in the southern reaches of the action-flickering front of the Axis and Russian armies, both sides were preparing plans for assault—the Germans on the Crimea, and on the Caucasus with Stalingrad as the immediate objective; the Russians as a counter to this likely intention.

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to compare this figure with the total of 18,000 troops carried in Convoy US.3 in May-June 1940 in six ships: *Queen Mary*, *Aquitania*, *Mauretania*, *Empress of Britain*, *Empress of Canada*, and *Andes*.

<sup>8</sup> Field Marshal Smuts, in a cable to Churchill, 12 Feb 1942.

<sup>9</sup> Roskill, Vol II, p. 188.

South-westward some 1,500 miles again, rival plans and preparations for the future of the Mediterranean and Middle East were coming to fruition. That other key to a war theatre—Malta—was an object of Axis air attack, and of British anxiety in the failure adequately to nourish it with seaborne supplies. An attempt in March to run in a heavily-escorted convoy of four ships, covered by Rear-Admiral P. L. Vian in *Cleopatra*<sup>1</sup> with three other light cruisers, and destroyers, was only partially successful. Vian's force, in the Battle of Sirte on 22nd March, fought what Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham described as "one of the most brilliant actions of the war, if not the most brilliant",<sup>2</sup> against a far more powerful Italian force comprising the battleship *Littorio*, two heavy and one light cruisers, and destroyers, which he drove off and kept from attacking the convoy. But of the four convoy ships two were sunk next morning by air attack outside Malta, and the two which safely entered the harbour were sunk shortly after in fierce air attacks. Of the total of 26,000 tons of supplies in the four ships, only 5,000 tons were landed. Churchill, determined that the island, with its vital influence on the sway of battle in North Africa, should not fall, was at this period

prepared to run serious naval risks to save Malta, and the Admiralty were in full accord. We prepared, and kept the option in hand, to send Admiral Somerville with all his carriers and the *Warspite* through the Canal into the Mediterranean, and to carry a convoy through to Malta, hoping to bring about a general engagement with the Italian Fleet on the way.<sup>3</sup>

In the event this was not necessary. On 20th April U.S.S. *Wasp*,<sup>4</sup> made available by the United States Navy in response to a request by Churchill to President Roosevelt, flew off 47 Spitfire fighter aircraft which she had embarked on the Clyde and ferried to the Mediterranean. All but one of them landed safely, and though the weight of enemy air attacks drastically reduced this valuable reinforcement within a few days, it in turn inflicted severe wounds on the attackers, and heralded a turn in the aerial tide over Malta, though the problem of running in substantial supplies remained.

Meanwhile, a few miles south in North Africa, plans for attack were formulating both with the British and the Germans, and in them Malta's fate—inextricably bound with that of North Africa—was a large consideration. Churchill and the British War Cabinet were anxious for a British drive westward from the Gazala-Bir Hacheim position, to secure airfields from which some measure of support could be given to Malta convoys. The Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, General Auchinleck, while understanding the critical nature of the Malta maintenance situation and the need for more westerly airfields, felt that it would be the beginning of June before his strength would be sufficiently built up to launch a

<sup>1</sup> HMS *Cleopatra*, cruiser (1940), 5,450 tons, ten 5.25-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

<sup>2</sup> Viscount Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey* (1951), p. 454.

<sup>3</sup> Churchill, Vol IV, p. 273.

<sup>4</sup> *Wasp*, US aircraft carrier (1940), 14,700 tons, eight 5-in guns, 84 aircraft, 30 kts. Sunk south of Solomon Is, 15 Sep 1942.



major offensive. The matter of airfields in western Cyrenaica was one of concern to the Axis Command also. The projected assault on Malta demanded complete air supremacy, and thus the reconquest of Cyrenaica—including the capture of Tobruk—and the thrust eastward as far as possible of the British Air Force was a prerequisite. When this was effected, it was proposed to invade Malta by both airborne and seaborne landings, the assault to be timed, to meet weather considerations, for mid-August at the latest. This meant that the Axis attack in Cyrenaica must be launched not later than the end of May. And it was to this end that General Rommel was bending his thoughts and energies.<sup>5</sup> While all this was going forward, unanimity was reached on the framework of a plan—put forward to the British Prime Minister by President Roosevelt—for a British-American cross-Channel invasion of Europe in 1943. “We must of course meet day-to-day emergencies in the East and Far East while preparing for the main stroke,” Churchill wrote to Roosevelt on 12th April. Such emergencies were now imminent.

#### IV

The prelude to the Japanese seaborne attack on Port Moresby, the consolidating operations to secure their lines of communication in the rear of Australian New Guinea, was conducted by a naval force comprising the seaplane carrier *Chitose*, light cruiser *Kinu*, four destroyers and four patrol boats, which between 1st and 20th April secured Fakfak, Babo, Sorong, Manokwari, Moemi, Seroeni, Nabire, Hollandia and Sarmi, in Dutch New Guinea, and returned to Ambon on the 21st. The objective of the forthcoming operation (Mo) was the occupation of Tulagi and Port Moresby, the establishment of air bases to facilitate air operations against Australia, and the capture of Nauru and Ocean Islands with their phosphate deposits. The operation was becoming one of urgency owing to the build-up of American air strength in Australia, where the Japanese estimated that American first-line aircraft numbered approximately 200.<sup>6</sup> The increasing air activity from Australia made it difficult for the Japanese both to assess the opposition they might expect, and to conceal their own dispositions. They suspected the presence of an American naval task force in the Coral Sea area, but “even though recent information has been unobtainable it can be said that [it] is not large”. They believed that a British force “of destroyers, a light cruiser, two or three heavy cruisers, and one battleship” was in the Australian area.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Weichold, in post-war “Essays”. Also *The Ciano Diaries* (1946), 12 May 1942. Ciano quotes General Cavallero, Chief of the Italian General Staff, as saying of the Malta operation: “I consider it absolutely essential for the future development of the war. If we take Malta, Libya will be safe. If not, the situation of the colony will always be precarious. I shall personally assume command of the operation. The Prince of Piedmont was considered, but for many reasons it was decided to leave him out.”

<sup>6</sup> There were about 300 US Army and RAAF aircraft under MacArthur's command at Port Moresby, Townsville, Charters Towers and Cloncurry. But many were non-operational owing to shortage of spare parts.

<sup>7</sup> May 1942, Mo Operation. (Tulagi, Port Moresby, Nauru-Ocean Invasion Operations.) Japanese document 18665F (WDI 56) ATIS translations. The British force referred to was probably Task Force 44, with *Chicago* taken to be a battleship.

The invasion forces assembled for Mo approximated closely to those used in the invasion of Rabaul some twelve weeks earlier. Again the Commander *Fourth Fleet*, Vice-Admiral Inouye, was in naval command of the operation, but instead of, as previously, exercising that command from Truk, he now did so from Rabaul in his flagship *Kashima*. Subordinate commanders and their forces were much the same. Rear-Admiral Shima, who had led one Rabaul invasion unit in minelayer *Okinoshima*, now flew his flag in that ship heading the Tulagi invasion group of a transport, destroyers *Kikuzuki* and *Yuzuki* of the 23rd Division, two submarine chasers and five minesweepers. His Rabaul colleague, Rear-Admiral Kajioka, led the Moresby invasion group in *Yubari*, with destroyers *Oite* and *Asanagi* of the 29th Division, *Mutsuki*, *Mochizuki* and *Yayoi* of the 30th, and *Uzuki* of the 23rd; minelayer *Tsugaru*, and four minesweepers, with five navy and six army transports. Rear-Admiral Matsuyama of the 18th Cruiser Squadron, who on the earlier occasion had been in charge of the Kavieng invasion, now provided support, flying his flag in *Tenryu*, with *Tatsuta*, the seaplane carrier *Kamikawa Maru*, and three gunboats. As at Rabaul, cover was provided by Rear-Admiral Goto's 6th Cruiser Squadron—*Aoba* (flag), *Kinugasa*, *Kako*, and *Furutaka*, now accompanied by the light carrier *Shoho*<sup>8</sup> and destroyer *Sazanami*. And, as at Rabaul, the striking force was provided by the 5th Carrier Division, *Zuikaku* and *Shokaku*. This force was less strongly composed than at Rabaul, where battleships were included, and now was commanded by Vice-Admiral Takagi with the 5th Cruiser Squadron, *Myoko* (flag), and *Haguro*, and destroyers *Ariake*, *Yugure*, *Shiratsuyu* and *Shigure*<sup>9</sup> of the 27th Division, and *Ushio* and *Akebono* of the 7th. Rear-Admiral Hara flew his flag in *Zuikaku*.

A force of six submarines formed a special attack group under the command of Captain Sasaki—*RO 33* and *RO 34*<sup>1</sup> of the 21st Submarine Group as a raiding force with mission "destroy enemy fleet", and *I 22*, *I 24*, *I 28* and *I 29* (the three firstnamed of which were equipped to carry midget submarines, and *I 29* a seaplane) of the 8th Submarine Squadron to "prepare for the enemy fleet, deploy and wait for the enemy".

The Japanese expected to encounter opposition from the American naval task force in the Coral Sea area, and from MacArthur's Australia-based air force. But they thought that their occupation of Tulagi, and establishment of a seaplane base there, would reverse the existing air reconnaissance situation and give them an advantage in the Coral Sea over the Allies working from more distant bases in Noumea and Port Moresby. They planned to catch the American task force, once it had entered the Coral Sea, in an enveloping movement with Goto's covering

<sup>8</sup> Allied Intelligence wrongly believed at the time that *Shoho* was *Ryukaku*, and some confusion was caused by the erroneous publication of that name in earlier accounts of the Coral Sea action.

<sup>9</sup> *Shiratsuyu*, *Shigure*, Japanese destroyers (1936), 1,580 tons, five 5-in guns, eight 24-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts. *Shiratsuyu* lost off Mindanao, 15 Jun 1944; *Shigure* sunk off Borneo, 24 Jan 1945.

<sup>1</sup> *RO 33*, *RO 34*, Japanese submarines (1934-35), 700 tons, one 3-in AA gun, four 21-in torpedo tubes, 16 kts. *RO 33* sunk by HMAS *Arunta* SE of Port Moresby 29 Aug 1942. *RO 34* sunk south of San Cristobal 4 Apr 1943.

force coming in from the north-west, to the west of the Solomon Islands, and Takagi's carrier striking force sweeping round to the east of the Solomons and into the Coral Sea from the south-east. The plan had the merit of simplicity, but made insufficient allowance for such considerations as that you must first catch your hare; or for such factors as the knowledge possessed by the enemy, and the decisions he would make as a result; and for the vagaries of the weather and signals communications.

The knowledge possessed by the enemy—unknown to the Japanese—was considerable. In a review dated 25th April 1942 (based on Intelligence garnered from aerial reconnaissance, coastwatcher reports, and the results of American eavesdropping on Japanese radio, which disclosed as early as 17th April much of what was afoot) the Director of the Combined Operational Intelligence Centre, Melbourne, outlined "indications of an imminent move by Japan against Australian territory", with the conclusion that the enemy intended carrying out an offensive from the Truk-New Britain area, probably during the first week in May, with as a major objective the control of the New Guinea-Torres Strait area, involving the occupation of Port Moresby. The review stated that the aircraft carriers *Zuikaku* and *Shokaku* were on passage from Formosa to Truk where, on or after 28th April, Japanese naval forces would probably approximate 3 aircraft carriers, *Zuikaku*, *Shokaku*, and *Ryukaku* (in reality *Shoho*), 5 heavy cruisers, 4 light cruisers, 12 destroyers and a submarine force. It was an estimate that came very close to the actual concentration.

To meet this threat the Allies disposed forces in the Coral Sea area. Already near by was Rear-Admiral Fletcher's *Yorktown* Task Force 17, operating out of Noumea and ordered (on 14th April) 1,000 miles east therefrom to Tongatapu for replenishment. At Noumea were the U.S. Ships *Chicago* and *Perkins*. Something over 1,000 miles south-westward, in Sydney, were *Australia*, *Hobart* and *Canberra* of Rear-Admiral Crace's Task Force 44, the two first-named undergoing minor repairs and *Canberra* refitting. And away to the north-east coming down from Pearl Harbour which it had left a week earlier after three weeks' refit, was the *Lexington* Task Force 11, now commanded by Rear-Admiral Aubrey W. Fitch, who had succeeded Wilson Brown on 3rd April.

Fletcher and Fitch were directed by Nimitz to rendezvous on 1st May at "Point Buttercup", 320 miles south of San Cristobal Island in the Solomons, where *Chicago* and *Perkins*, escorting the oiler *Tippecanoe* from Noumea, were to join company. Crace, with *Australia* and *Hobart* (*Canberra* could not be made ready in time) was to join the others in the Coral Sea on 4th May, and sailed from Sydney accordingly on the 1st. He was met at Hervey Bay by the U.S. destroyer *Whipple*. Fletcher was to assume tactical command of the combined force and "operate in the Coral Sea according to circumstances".<sup>3</sup> Forces not under Fletcher's tactical

<sup>3</sup> Actually Crace was senior to Fletcher, but it had been agreed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff "that the senior United States naval officer commanding a carrier task force will, regardless of relative rank, exercise tactical command of the combined units which operate in the South and South-West Pacific areas".

command, but which cooperated, were the eleven submarines of Captain R. W. Christie's Task Group 42.1 which, based on Brisbane, patrolled around Papua, the Louisiades and Bismarcks; and MacArthur's air forces, based on Australia, which were charged with "air reconnaissance of the general area".

Japanese surface moves started on 29th April (the previous day, some 6,000 miles away on the far side of the Indian Ocean, the second of two assault convoys sailed from Durban for the British attack on Diego Suarez, Madagascar), when Rear-Admiral Shima's Tulagi invasion force left Rabaul, and Matsuyama's support group sailed from Truk. Shima steamed south-east, keeping well to the west of Bougainville and the Solomons until he was south-west of Guadalcanal, when he turned north-east for his objective. Matsuyama, coming down due south from Truk, also kept Bougainville to the eastward. Goto's covering force left Truk on the 30th, and came down farther east between Bougainville and Choiseul Islands before joining Matsuyama in patrolling south-west of New Georgia. On shore there was nothing to oppose the Japanese assault. Sightings of ships in the vicinity of New Georgia by Allied reconnaissance aircraft and, in Thousand Ships Bay, by coastwatcher D. G. Kennedy<sup>4</sup> on Ysabel Island on 2nd May, coupled with determined air attacks on Tulagi from 6.30 a.m. on that day<sup>5</sup> (on which Port Moresby experienced its thirty-eighth Japanese air raid) suggested strongly that Japanese occupation was imminent. Flying Officer Peagam,<sup>6</sup> Commanding Officer of the R.A.A.F. base on Tanambogo Island, Tulagi Harbour, decided to withdraw the small body of air force and A.I.F. troops (about 50 in all) and at 11 a.m. on the 2nd he removed the R.A.A.F. contingent to Florida Island, where they boarded the island trading vessel *Balus*, concealed at the eastern end. The A.I.F. contingent remained on Tanambogo until 8 p.m., carrying out demolitions, and then left by schooner and joined *Balus*. They reached Vila in safety. "It was an able retreat, made at the very last moment, and a credit to the junior officers who organised and carried it out."<sup>7</sup> Something of what was happening in the Tulagi area was seen from across the water to the south, from Gold Ridge, 4,000 feet up on Guadalcanal, where a coastwatcher, Lieutenant Macfarlan,<sup>8</sup> R.A.N.V.R., formerly stationed at Tulagi, had established himself with a teleradio in March in anticipation of Tulagi's occupation by the Japanese.

Fletcher and Fitch joined company at 6.15 a.m. on 1st May, and Fletcher assumed tactical command of a force which comprised the two aircraft carriers, five heavy cruisers—*Minneapolis*, *New Orleans*, *Astoria*, *Chester* and *Portland*, under the command of Rear-Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid,

<sup>4</sup> Maj D. G. Kennedy, DSO, District Commissioner, British Solomon Islands Protectorate 1940-46. Of Invercargill, NZ; b. Springhills, Southland, NZ, 12 Mar 1898.

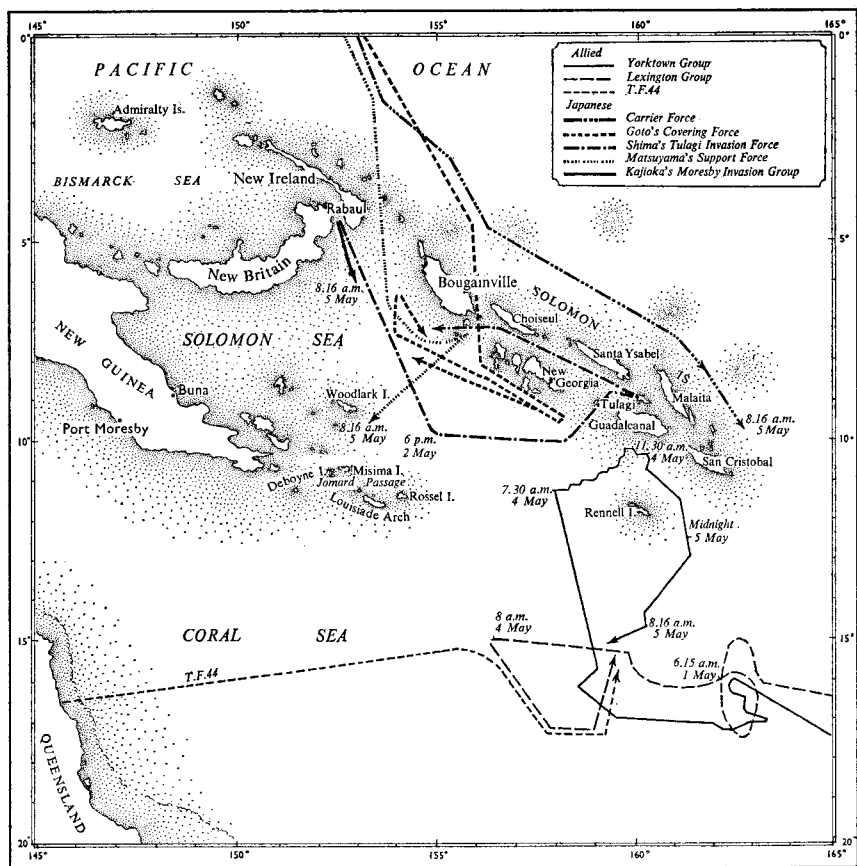
<sup>5</sup> There were six Japanese air attacks on Tulagi between 6.30 a.m. and 5 p.m. on the 2nd.

<sup>6</sup> F-O R. B. Peagam; RAAF. AOB Tulagi 1942. Accountant and assistant secretary; of Applecross, WA; b. 22 Apr 1897.

<sup>7</sup> E. A. Feldt, *The Coast Watchers* (1946), p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> Lt-Cdr D. S. Macfarlan, RANVR. NLO Tulagi 1941-42; AIB. Of Melbourne; b. Aberdeen, Scotland, 12 Mar 1908.

U.S.N.—eleven destroyers,<sup>9</sup> and the oiler *Neosho*. Fletcher commenced fuelling T.F.17 from *Neosho*, and directed Fitch to a point a few miles west to meet *Chicago*, *Perkins* and *Tiptecanoe*, and fuel from the oiler. At this time the Japanese Tulagi invasion forces were some 600 miles to the north-west making down for their objective, and Takagi with his



Major movements in Coral Sea Battle, 1st-5th May 1942

carrier striking force was just leaving Truk to enter the Coral Sea east about the Solomons. The Port Moresby invasion force was still at Rabaul. Crace, with *Australia* and *Hobart*, was leaving Sydney.

During the next 36 hours the two American carrier groups fuelled, but at 6 p.m. on 2nd May Fletcher, who had completed first, and who had been receiving Intelligence from MacArthur about the approach of enemy forces, took Task Force 17 (consisting of *Yorktown*, *Astoria*, *Chester*,

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Ships *Phelps*, *Dewey*, *Farragut*, *Aylwin*, *Monaghan*, *Morris*, *Anderson*, *Hammann*, *Russell*, *Sims* and *Worden*.

and *Portland*, with six destroyers) west at slow speed into the Coral Sea to make aircraft searches for the Japanese, leaving Fitch orders to rejoin him at daylight on 4th May in latitude 15 degrees south, longitude 157 degrees east, 400 miles south-west of Tulagi. When Fletcher set off westward, Shima's invasion force was the enemy nearest to him, some 460 miles N.N.W. and at its "farthest south", just turning north-east for Tulagi. Throughout 3rd May (what time Shima's invaders were making their unopposed landings on Tulagi while Goto's covering force and Matsuyama's support force manoeuvred to the north-west), the distance widened between the two American task forces away to the south, and it was not until an hour after noon that Fitch completed fuelling and set off westwards to join Fletcher at the rendezvous fixed for next morning. But at 7 p.m. Fletcher received an Intelligence report of the landings at Tulagi and of Kennedy's sightings off Ysabel Island, and sent *Neosho*, escorted by the destroyer *Russell*, to join Fitch next morning and, with him, then to proceed eastward to a new rendezvous for all forces about 300 miles south of Guadalcanal at daybreak on the 5th. Fletcher himself was going to strike at the Japanese invaders, and by 8.30 p.m. on the 3rd T.F.17 was heading north at 27 knots. But by then most of the birds had flown. When Tulagi was secured in the forenoon of the 3rd, Goto and Matsuyama went off to the westward on the next stage of the Moresby operation; Takagi and his carriers were still north of Bougainville; and the Port Moresby invasion group had not yet left Rabaul. The only targets for *Yorktown*'s aircraft were a few of Shima's invasion convoy in the waters between Tulagi and Guadalcanal.

The Coral Sea operations between 4th and 8th May were marked meteorologically by successive overcast-producing cold fronts which alternately favoured the opposing forces. It was under the shelter of one such that Fletcher reached his aircraft launching position, about 100 miles south-west of Guadalcanal, at 6.30 a.m. on the 4th. He flew off a striking force of 12 torpedo bombers and 28 dive bombers. In a series of three attacks on Tulagi—the first delivered at 8.15 a.m. and the last at 3 p.m.—the American pilots "believed they had sunk two destroyers, one freighter and four gunboats, forced a light cruiser ashore, and severely damaged a third destroyer, a second freighter and a seaplane tender".<sup>10</sup> This was a too rosy picture. Japanese losses at Tulagi were, in fact, the destroyer *Kikuzuki*, converted minesweeper *Tama Maru*, and minesweepers *No. 1* and *No. 2* sunk; *Okinoshima*, destroyer *Yuzuki*, and converted submarine chaser *Tama Maru No. 8*, damaged. Japanese casualties were 87 killed and 124 wounded.<sup>1</sup> The Americans lost three aircraft—one torpedo bomber and crew, and two fighters of which the pilots were rescued.

<sup>10</sup> Morison, Vol IV, p. 27.

<sup>1</sup> Japanese document 18665F (WD156). The American airmen were not alone in over-estimating the Japanese vessels present and the results of the raid. Macfarlan, watching from Gold Ridge, later wrote: "Visibility on 3rd May was poor, and I could not observe the number of vessels in Tulagi Harbour, but the next day I saw 16 vessels, including four cruisers, and reported same. During that day, American aircraft, both dive bombers and torpedo bombers, attacked the vessels in the harbour, and apparently scored many hits. I personally saw four vessels sink in the vicinity of Savo and the north-western end of Florida."

At 5 p.m., Fletcher, having recovered his aircraft, set off south again, and at 8.16 a.m. on 5th May met the others—including Crace and Task Force 44—in latitude 15 degrees south, longitude 160 degrees east, 320 miles south of Guadalcanal; and the combined fleet began fuelling from *Neosho*. At this time the nearest enemy force was Takagi's two carriers and two cruisers about 400 miles to the N.N.E., steaming south-east at 25 knots well to the east of Malaita, to round San Cristobal and enter the Coral Sea on a north-westerly course between that and Rennell Island. Goto and his covering force were some 500 miles away to the north-west of Fletcher, south of Bougainville, where they were to fuel before covering the Moresby operation. Away some 150 miles to the south-west of them was Matsuyama's supporting force, steering south-west for Deboyne Island, there to establish a temporary seaplane base with the seaplane carrier *Kamikawa Maru* before retiring north-westwards midway between the tail of New Guinea and Woodlark Island. And north of Goto was Shima's Tulagi invasion force, bound westward to join Kajioka's Moresby invasion force, which had left Rabaul at 6 p.m. on the 4th and was now steaming S.S.E. in the latitude of New Britain's southern extremity. Each of the opposing forces knew of the presence of the enemy, but not his strength or his whereabouts; though it was probably the vigilance of one of *Yorktown's* aircraft on patrol that morning, in intercepting and shooting down a four-engined seaplane of the *25th Air Flotilla* based on Rabaul, which denied the disclosure of Fletcher's position to the Japanese. Had they but known the whole situation, the pieces were nicely arranged on the board for the Japanese to carry into execution their plan to catch the Allied forces between two fires. But when his reconnaissance aircraft failed to return, though Admiral Inouye in Rabaul assumed that it had been shot down, his not knowing when or where left him otherwise none the wiser.

(And while, on this forenoon of 5th May in the Coral Sea, the ships of Fletcher, Fitch, and Crace fuelled as they steamed within visual signalling distance of each other enjoying "the perfect weather of tropic seas when fresh trades are blowing—wind south-east, sky blue and cloud-freighted, with an opalescent sea stretching to an encircling horizon at maximum visibility"; far away on the western side of the Indian Ocean, the naval forces and assault ships—"no less than thirty-four, some of them large liners"—of Admiral Syfret's armada were stealing through the darkness and reefs sheltering Courrier Bay, on the northern end of Madagascar, for the attack on Diego Suarez. They were successfully to complete their task before the Battle of the Coral Sea was ended.)

Throughout the 5th and most of 6th May, Fletcher's forces remained roughly grouped. At 7 a.m. on the 6th he integrated the two carrier forces and Crace's T.F.44 into one force, Task Force 17. All the time he was receiving reports of Japanese ships, including aircraft carriers, south of the Solomons. (*Shoho* and two heavy cruisers were sighted by an Australia-based American aircraft at 11.35 a.m. on the 4th, about 40 miles south of Bougainville. She was at first believed by Allied Intelligence to be

either *Zuikaku* or *Shokaku*, but was finally accepted as *Ryukaku*.) But it was not until the afternoon of the 6th that Fletcher's Intelligence was able to piece the fragments into a reliable picture of the north-west—that Kajioka's Moresby invasion group would come through Jomard Passage, between Misima and Tagula Islands off the tail of New Guinea on 7th or 8th May, after establishing a seaplane base in the Louisiades. So, at 7.30 p.m. on the 6th, Fletcher, who had ceased fuelling and detached *Neosho*, escorted by the destroyer *Sims*, southwards to the next fuelling position in latitude 16 degrees south, longitude 158 degrees east, set course to the north-west, so as to be within striking distance of Kajioka by daylight next morning.

His mind would have given priority to another consideration had he but known that on that evening of 6th May Takagi's striking force was only 70 miles due north of him, engaged in fuelling. Because of the inadequacy of MacArthur's land-based air reconnaissance, little was known of Takagi's movements. Fletcher knew nothing of them, and had no hint of the Japanese envelopment plan. A combination of factors—the weather operating against Fletcher, because it was now the Japanese who were shielded by the overcast of the cold front and Fletcher's own air searches failed to discover them; and Takagi's neglect to carry out long-range searches from his carriers on 5th and 6th May (when they would almost certainly have found Fletcher out in the bright sunlight) operating against the Japanese—kept the opponents in ignorance of each other's proximity. As the U.S. naval historian remarked:<sup>2</sup> "The main action of the Battle of the Coral Sea should have been fought on 6 May, and would have been if either admiral had been aware of the other's presence."

As it was, action came next morning in an air attack from Takagi's carriers. At 6 a.m. on the 7th, Takagi sent out search aircraft to the south, and an hour and a half later they sighted *Neosho* and *Sims* and reported them as an aircraft carrier and cruiser. In the Japanese striking force this report was accepted as that of Fletcher's task force (then actually some 270 miles W.N.W. of the oiler and her escort) and an all-out bombing and torpedo attack was launched. In a series of high-level bombing attacks between 9.30 a.m. and noon *Sims* was sunk and *Neosho* crippled and on fire from seven direct hits and eight near-misses. She was sunk later by the destroyer *Henley*.<sup>3</sup> Casualties in both ships were heavy. The cost to the Japanese was six aircraft, and an opportunity missed to attack Fletcher.

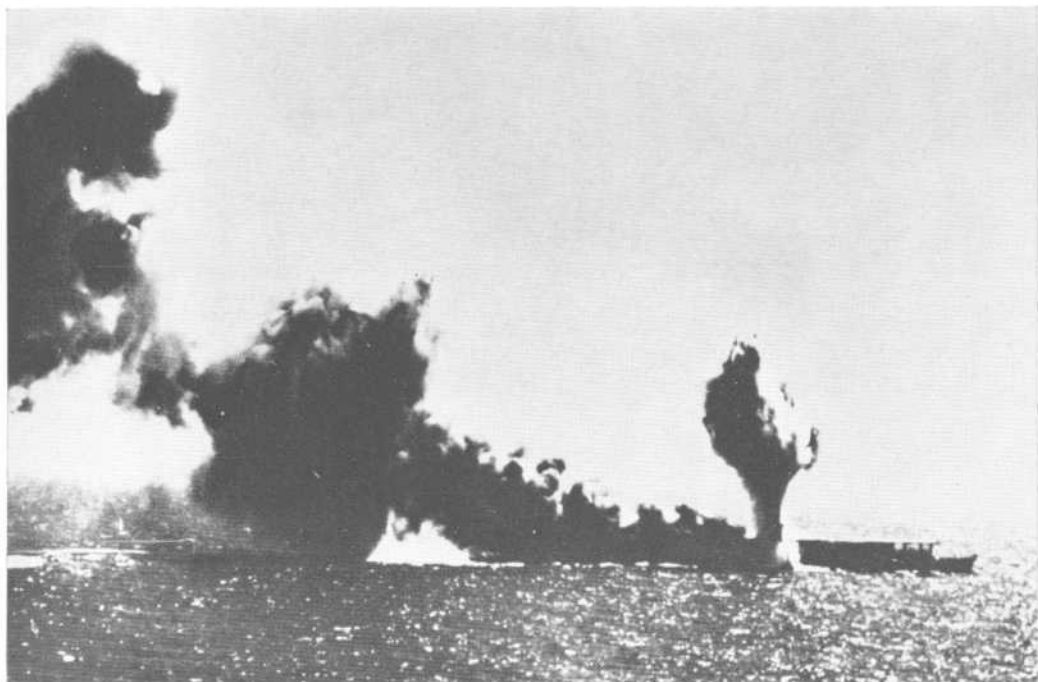
As stated above Fletcher, at the time *Sims* and *Neosho* were sighted by the Japanese, was some 270 miles W.N.W. of them. He was unaware

<sup>2</sup> Morison, Vol IV, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Henley*, US destroyer (1937), 1,500 tons, four 5-in guns, sixteen 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. Sunk off Finschhafen, 3 Oct 1943.

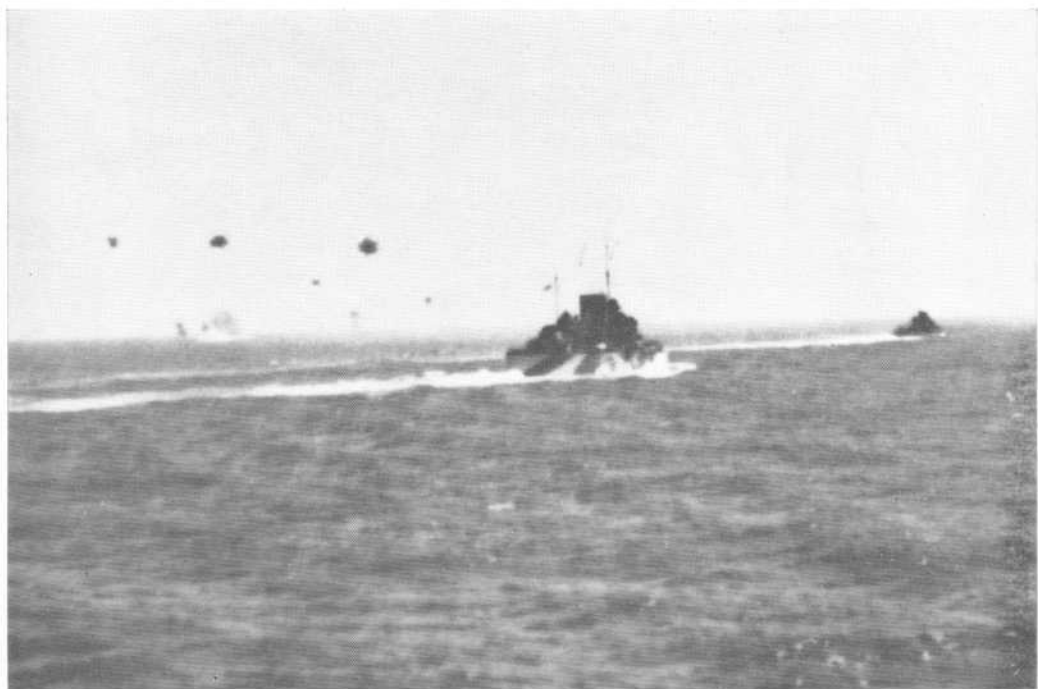
*Neosho* drifted westerly for four days until she was found by an American flying-boat which directed *Henley* to her in the afternoon of 11th May. *Henley* took off the 123 still on board, sank the wreck, and searched for some fruitless hours for other survivors on rafts. Three days later one raft with four men alive on it (sole survivors of 68 men in four rafts) was found by the destroyer *Helm*.





(U.S. Navy)

The Japanese aircraft carrier *Shoho* under air attack in the Battle of the Coral Sea,  
7th May 1942.



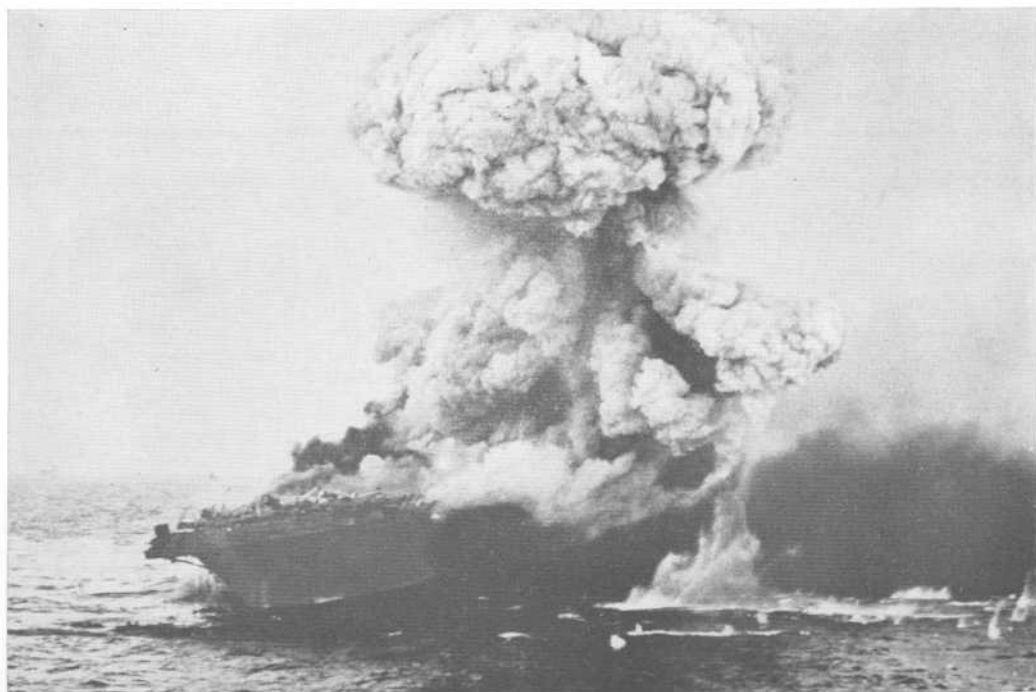
(R.A.N. Historical Section)

H.M.A.S. *Australia* and TG.17.3 under air attack at Coral Sea, 7th May 1942.



(U.S. Navy)

The Japanese aircraft carrier *Shokaku*, the target for American bombers at Coral Sea, 8th May 1942.



(U.S. Navy)

The United States aircraft carrier *Lexington* suffers a between-decks explosion at Coral Sea, 8th May 1942.

of the presence of Takagi about 240 miles east of him, and was concentrating on finding the Japanese striking force away to his north. He considered that the enemy forces there comprised a battleship (doubtful), 2 aircraft carriers, 7 cruisers, 18 destroyers, one submarine tender, 6 submarines, one seaplane carrier, and 17 transports, and that these ships were headed towards Deboyne Island area. This apparent destination was confirmed by a signal from Comsouwespac (Vice-Admiral Leary) reporting them as heading for Jomard Passage. The ships actually north of Fletcher then were Goto's covering group a little to the north of Misima Island, with *Shoho* launching aircraft to cover the Port Moresby invasion group, which was then about 30 miles south-west of Goto and heading for Jomard Passage shepherded by Matsuyama's supporting force. Fletcher, who altered course to north from north-westerly at 7 a.m. in order to come to grips with the aircraft carriers, at the same time detached Crace and his support group (now designated Task Group 17.3, and comprising *Australia*, *Chicago*, *Hobart*, and destroyers *Perkins*, *Walke*<sup>4</sup> and *Farragut*) to continue north-westerly and "destroy enemy ships reported passing through Jomard Passage". At 10 a.m., when he was not far over the horizon from Fletcher, Crace was sighted by a Japanese reconnaissance aircraft which shadowed him. At the same time Fletcher's north-searching reconnaissance aircraft reported "two carriers and four heavy cruisers" about 225 miles to the north-westward of the American carriers. Fletcher concluded this was Takagi's striking force. Actually what had been sighted from the aircraft were the vessels of Matsuyama's support force. The mistake in reporting was not corrected until the American attacking aircraft—93 in all, including high-level, dive, and torpedo bombers—were launched and on their way. But now the weather was on the side of the Americans. Fletcher's carriers were in the cold front and shielded by overcast. Goto was in broad sunlight, and near enough to the reported position of the "two carriers and four heavy cruisers" for him to be sighted by the attacking aircraft and their attack to be concentrated on *Shoho*. The attack commenced a few minutes after 11 a.m., and "by 11.30 the entire vessel was damaged by bombs, torpedoes and self-exploded enemy planes".<sup>5</sup> Abandon ship was ordered at 11.31, and *Shoho* sank within five minutes in latitude 10 degrees 29 minutes south, longitude 152 degrees 55 minutes east. Fifteen of the ship's total complement of 21 aircraft went down with her. In the action, 638 Japanese were killed and 73 wounded.<sup>6</sup> The destroyer *Sazanami* rescued about 100 survivors from *Shoho*. The Americans lost three aircraft.

Meanwhile Admiral Inouye, in Rabaul, aware through his reconnaissance of the respective positions of Crace and Fletcher, had become anxious

<sup>4</sup> *Walke*, US destroyer (1940), 1,570 tons, four 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. Sunk off Guadalcanal, 15 Nov 1942.

<sup>5</sup> *Shoho's War Diary*, quoted by Morison, Vol IV, p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> Japanese document 16269-A "The Battle of the Coral Sea" (ATIS translation). According to a drawing which was reproduced from a Japanese naval document in *The Campaigns of the Pacific War*, U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, Naval Analysis Division (1946), p. 37, *Shoho* suffered seven torpedo hits (three to port and four to starboard) and 13 direct bomb hits.



and *Chicago* respectively each eight cables on *Australia*'s port and star-board quarters, and a destroyer stationed six cables ahead of each cruiser.

Threatened with air attack from the carrier to the north, and by land-based aircraft from Rabaul, and himself lacking air cover, Crace's position was parlous. According to the U.S. naval historian,<sup>7</sup> Fletcher later explained that he sent Crace on this mission because he himself expected an air duel with enemy carriers and wished to ensure that the Japanese invasion would be thwarted even if they finished him. But, as Morison remarked:

if Takagi had stopped Fletcher, Crace's ships would probably have been chewed up too; and, by sending Crace chasing westward, Fletcher weakened his already exiguous anti-aircraft screen and lessened his chances of checking Takagi. Conversely, if Fletcher won the carrier battle he would be in a position to break up the Port Moresby invasion group even if they did turn the corner.

Not the least of Crace's worries was the fact that from the time he parted company with Fletcher he was left completely in the dark as to what was going on—except for such decipherable wireless signals as he was able to intercept. These included a report from *Neosho* that she was being bombed by three aircraft—probably (considered Crace) Japanese reconnaissance aircraft searching for *Yorktown*. At 1 p.m. no further reports had reached him of the enemy to his north, but

a message from Task Force 17's aircraft to the effect that "we got the carrier good" had been intercepted. This was good news and on the assumption that this referred to the carrier reported earlier off Misima, it lessened considerably the air threat to Task Group 17.3.

Crace continued towards China Strait to ensure being to the westward of enemy vessels which might proceed south through the Louisiade Archipelago.

At 2.27 p.m., when he was about 70 miles due south of Deboyne Island, eleven aircraft were sighted at long range to the south and were engaged by *Chicago*, *Hobart*, and destroyers.<sup>8</sup> Doubt existed as to their character, and observers described them variously as "Dauntless" and B-26 (American); Zero fighters (Japanese); and "twin-engined aircraft". A few minutes later a Dauntless (American carrier-borne dive bomber) aircraft approached *Australia*, identified itself, and asked the bearing and distance of the carrier. "As this was unknown, aircraft was instructed to proceed to Port Moresby."

Twenty-six minutes later, at 3.06 p.m., the first attack on the force was made by twelve two-engined land-based navy bombers. It was "most determined but fortunately badly delivered". Torpedoes were dropped at ranges of between 1,000 and 1,500 yards, after which the aircraft flew on and fired on the ships with machine-guns and cannon. Timely and skilful handling enabled *Australia* to avoid two torpedoes which passed

<sup>7</sup> Morison, Vol IV, pp. 37-8.

<sup>8</sup> Morison classified this as an attack by "eleven single-engined land-based planes. All ships opened fire and drove them off." Morison, Vol IV, p. 38.

particularly close, and *Chicago* also cleverly avoided three well-aimed torpedoes. Five of the aircraft were shot down.<sup>9</sup>

A few minutes after this attack, at 3.16 p.m., 19 heavy bombers attacked *Australia* from astern and up sun at a height of about 18,000 feet. Bombing was accurate. Some twenty 500-lb bombs, and several smaller, were dropped in a pattern with a spread of 500 yards, and the flagship was straddled in all directions, with her upper decks drenched with spray, though only superficial damage was suffered from bomb fragments. Casualties in the squadron as a result of these attacks were two fatally wounded in *Chicago*, and seven others slightly injured. These aircraft had only just gone when three more, flying at 25,000 feet, dropped bombs close to *Perkins*.<sup>1</sup> Crace later reported:

It was subsequently discovered that these aircraft were U.S. Army B-26 from Townsville, and they were good enough to photograph Task Group 17.3 a few seconds after "bomb release", thus proving beyond all doubt that they had attacked their own ships. Fortunately their bombing, in comparison with that of the Japanese formation a few moments earlier, was disgraceful!<sup>2</sup>

Crace assumed that, in the Japanese attacks, he was a substitute target for Fletcher's carriers, which his attackers had been unable to find. (On the other hand, Inouye knew of his presence south of Jomard Passage, and possibly used his land-based air from Rabaul to deal with Crace and clear the road for the Moresby invasion group, leaving Takagi to deal with Fletcher.) Since Crace had no air support and anticipated further attacks: "I had received no information from the Commander, Task Force 17 regarding his position, his intentions, or what had been achieved during the day"; and since reconnaissance reports indicated that the Moresby invasion group was now moving to the northward, he decided to retire south and proceed during the night so as to be about 220 miles south-east of Port Moresby at daylight next morning, in a position to intercept any enemy ships coming south-west through Jomard Passage or China Strait. This decision was nearly upset by signals received from Australia (from A.C.H. Townsville, and from Comsouwespac) at 6.30 p.m. These reported five transports in one instance, and three transports and three warships in the other, 30 miles and 25 miles respectively south-west of Jomard Passage at about 3 p.m. But it was soon realised that these ships were in fact those of Task Group 17.3 itself.

The dangers of such reports are emphasised (Crace subsequently wrote), and if it had not been that a "Dauntless" aircraft [referred to above as asking the distance and bearing of the carrier] approached from the reported position of the enemy forces at about this time, it may not have been so readily appreciated that these enemy forces did not in fact exist. An attempt to intercept may have resulted in serious damage from the air to our group the following day.

<sup>9</sup> *The Campaigns of the Pacific War* (p. 53) says 10 of the torpedo aircraft were shot down, and quotes the war diary of 25th Air Flotilla as one of its sources.

<sup>1</sup> Morison (p. 38) says that *Farragut* was the target.

<sup>2</sup> Crace complained to Leary about the attack, and Leary replied that he had plans to improve army recognition of naval vessels. But the army air commander under General MacArthur insisted that there had been no bombing of Crace's force, declined the plans and prohibited further discussion of the matter. (Morison, Vol IV, p. 39.)

At dawn on 8th May Crace was, as he had planned, about 220 miles south-east of Port Moresby, still lacking any information from Fletcher, and becoming concerned at the fuel situation in *Hobart* and the destroyers. In relation to the two forces that were his main concern—Kajioka's Moresby invasion force and Fletcher's Task Force 17—he was at one of the points of an equilateral triangle whose sides were approximately 350 miles long. That distance N.E. by E. of him was Kajioka (with Matsuyama's Support Force some 60 miles away to the north-west) well north of the *Louisiades* and headed for Rabaul escorted by two of Goto's cruisers. The other two had been ordered by Inouye to reinforce Takagi. Three hundred and fifty miles E.S.E. of Crace was Fletcher, who was out in the clear sunlight of a perfect day of high visibility, and who was launching search aircraft from *Lexington* to find Takagi. The luck of the weather had changed again. Now it was Takagi who was under cloud cover, some 180 miles to the N.N.E. of Fletcher, and with his search aircraft also out looking for his enemy.

Sightings were mutual soon after 8 a.m., and around two-and-a-half hours later the opposing aircraft carriers (then about 160 miles apart with the Japanese almost due north of the Americans) were delivering long-range blows at each other with aircraft attacks. The Americans got in first, with attacks by 39 aircraft—torpedo bombers and dive bombers—on *Shokaku*. The two Japanese carriers, each screened by two heavy cruisers and two or three destroyers, were steering south-westerly, eight to ten miles apart, and *Zuikaku* and her group disappeared into a rain squall just before the attack began. When she emerged a few minutes later Admiral Hara, on her bridge, saw her sister ship "burning furiously" from two direct hits delivered by the American dive bombers. The torpedo bombers failed to score.

The attack by *Yorktown*'s aircraft began at 10.57 a.m. At 11.18 a.m., a few minutes after it ended and the aircraft turned south for home, the Japanese attack on the American carriers began, 33 dive bombers, 18 torpedo bombers, and 18 fighters. The Japanese torpedoes again proved more lethal than the American. In a nineteen-minute period *Lexington* received two on the port side—one forward and one opposite the bridge—two direct bomb hits, and a number of near-misses which ruptured plates. *Yorktown*, more easily manoeuvrable than her bigger sister, successfully evaded nine torpedo attacks, and received one 800-lb bomb hit which killed or badly injured 66 men, but did no serious material damage. Meanwhile, of *Lexington*'s 49 aircraft dispatched to attack the Japanese carriers, only 21—11 torpedo and four dive bombers, and six fighters—found the target. Again the torpedoes failed to score, but the dive bombers added another direct hit on *Shokaku*, which lost 108 men killed and 40 wounded, and was seriously damaged. The battle—the first in history in which the opposing surface vessels were far beyond sight and range of each other—was over by 11.40 a.m. The Americans believed that they

had sunk *Shokaku*; the Japanese were exuberant in their conviction that they had sent to the bottom two American carriers—one large and one medium.<sup>3</sup> It was a conviction that was to cost them dear in another naval air battle a month later. The Japanese airmen believed that, in addition to sinking the two carriers, they had left burning “one battleship or cruiser”. The respective aircraft losses in the battle were 43 Japanese (30 in combat and 13 operational) and 33 American from all causes.

Away to the westward faint and distorted echoes of the action reached Task Group 17.3, but left Crace still in the dark as to Fletcher's position, condition, and intentions.

The carriers' aircraft (he subsequently reported) could be heard conversing with their parent ships; but as was the case yesterday, their reports were entirely valueless to me. Late in the forenoon it seemed from reports on Fighter Direction Wave that our carriers were not only attacking the enemy but they themselves were being attacked from the air. The situation was far from clear but it was learned from intercepted aircraft reports that an enemy carrier in an unknown position had received two hits from torpedoes and two from 1,000-lb bombs. This was apparently the second carrier to have been damaged while two others were now thought to be in the area.

In this fog of war, and with his force being “fairly continuously shadowed”, Crace considered the situation unsafe for fuelling. But during the afternoon *Hobart* (herself short of fuel) gave *Perkins* 200 tons and, after sunset, was detached with *Walke* (who had engine trouble) to Brisbane. The rest of the force remained in the area, available to contest any enemy attempt to approach Port Moresby.

Crace deduced—on such meagre information as had reached him, from decipherable intercepts of aircraft radio messages and earlier Australian reconnaissance reports—that one enemy carrier had been sunk and another damaged, and that there were probably two more in the vicinity of 12 degrees south and 156 degrees east and that both Fletcher's carriers were somewhere around. This was not so. About the time *Hobart* was detached to Brisbane, there were only two carriers east of Crace—*Yorktown* some 400 miles E.S.E. of him, and headed south; and *Zuikaku*, about the same distance to the E.N.E., headed north. *Shokaku* had not sunk. Badly damaged, and destined to spend some weeks in dockyard hands repairing her injuries, she was well to the north on her way home. Hara had detached her at 1 p.m. Only one carrier remained to Fletcher, also. *Lexington*, damaged, but effective and apparently getting back into trim, suffered delayed damage during the afternoon from heavy internal explosions and fires caused by petrol vapours released by the torpedo hits. The fires finally got out of hand, and at 8 p.m. on the 8th, after all the living among her company had been removed, she was torpedoed by the destroyer *Phelps*,<sup>4</sup> and sank in 2,400 fathoms, latitude 15 degrees 12

<sup>3</sup> They identified these as *Saratoga* (*Lexington*'s sister ship) and either *Enterprise* or *Yorktown*, so that their airmen's ship recognition was good though their reading of results was over-optimistic.

<sup>4</sup> *Phelps*, US destroyer (1936), 1,805 tons, five 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 37 kts.



minutes south, longitude 155 degrees 27 minutes east. The bodies of 216 men, and the remains of 36 aircraft, went down with her.<sup>5</sup>

Two hours later, Inouye, in Rabaul, assuming Task Force 17 had been destroyed, ordered Takagi to retire to Truk, and postponed the Moresby invasion until 3rd July. Away in Pearl Harbour Admiral Nimitz also instructed Fletcher to withdraw from the Coral Sea. At midnight, the Japanese Commander-in-Chief Combined Fleet, Admiral Yamamoto, countermanded Inouye's order and sent Takagi south again to "annihilate remaining enemy forces". But the separating distance, and Fletcher's southerly course, denied further contact between the opponents. Fletcher himself, with *Yorktown* and part of his cruiser and destroyer force went to Tongatapu; and Rear-Admiral Kinkaid, with three cruisers and four destroyers, went to Noumea. Takagi, who was joined by Goto and the rest of his *6th Cruiser Squadron* at noon on 10th May, reached his "farthest south", 100 miles due east of *Lexington's* last resting place, an hour or two later, and then turned north again. At noon on the 11th he was steering east between Rennell and San Cristobal Islands to return to Truk east about the Solomons.

It was at noon on the 11th (the day before the Russian General Timoshenko, thousands of miles away north-west over the earth's curve, beyond the Sea of Azov, launched a heavy attack on the poised German armies) that Crace and the balance of Task Group 17.3 reached home at Cid Harbour, on the north Queensland coast. Throughout 9th May Crace (after fuelling *Farragut* from *Australia* during the forenoon about 300 miles S.S.W. of China Strait) kept to the northward in a favourable position for intercepting enemy ships approaching Port Moresby. He was still completely in the dark as to events, and could only make his own deductions. These, at 7 p.m. on the 9th, led him to consider that

it seemed probable that *Yorktown* and *Lexington* at this time were badly in need of replacement aircraft, bombs, and torpedoes, while the destroyers of this group were probably in need of fuel. Again I had received no intimation of Commander Task Force 17's position or intentions but I considered it probable that he had, by now, retired. It seemed equally probable, from the absence of reports of vessels in the Louisiades area, that the enemy's advance had now definitely been checked.

Crace therefore decided to hold on to the northward until 1 a.m. on 10th May, and if no further information regarding Japanese forces moving to the southward was received by then, himself to retire to Australia. This he did, and reached the Barrier Reef at Grafton Passage before sunset on the 10th, and Cid Harbour next day.

So ended the Battle of the Coral Sea, in a tactical victory for the Japanese but a strategic victory for the Allies. The main object of the Japanese operation, the capture of Port Moresby, was denied them. Nor did the Japanese surface forces ever again get as far south as they did on this occasion. They captured Tulagi—and its recapture by the Americans

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<sup>5</sup> An official British source listed aircraft losses on 7th-8th May as United States 65, Japanese 85. The official Japanese figure was 80.

three months later was a costly undertaking; but the subsidiary operation, the capture of Nauru and Ocean Islands, had to be postponed indefinitely with the loss of the main ship allocated to the operation—Rear-Admiral Shima's flagship *Okinoshima*—sunk by the U.S. submarine *S 42*<sup>6</sup> on 11th May. Relatively greater losses were suffered by the Allies, but the damage inflicted on *Shokaku* denied her to the fleet for two months, and *Zuikaku*'s aircraft losses kept her out of the war for a month. The presence of these two ships might well have turned the tide in the forthcoming Battle of Midway.

Captain Mineo Yamaoka, at the time Senior Staff Officer *5th Carrier Division*, in a post-war expression of opinion<sup>7</sup> suggested that the main factors leading to the Japanese failure were "the inability"—through lack of reconnaissance—"to grasp clearly the enemy situation before the operations. . . . Only after the great air attack on Tulagi on the 4th May could the existence and general strength of the United States task force be estimated for the first time"; the inability to maintain the close and continuous reconnaissance necessary "in a complex tactical situation"; and the lack of provision for replacement of lost aircraft—"it was impossible to replace them unless the carriers returned to base at Truk. Although numerous flight personnel remained, it was regrettable that it was impossible to make a quick recovery in air strength".

To the world, however, Japan claimed a victory, and Tokyo radio, broadcasting the views of the Foreign Office organ *Times and Advertiser*, stated:

The Coral Sea battle is more than just another naval victory for Japan. It marks another emphatic step in the inevitable march of the Japanese Empire towards destruction of the old order and the building of a new and better world order. The tremendous significance of this victory could hardly be exaggerated.

The Germans followed this line with the announcement that

after this new defeat, the United States warships will hardly dare to face the Japanese Fleet again, since any United States warship which accepts action with the Japanese naval forces is as good as lost.

In Australia the Government, on 6th May 1942, invested General MacArthur with wide powers in the control of publicity and publicity censorship of all matters relating to operations.<sup>8</sup> In the past the Defence Services had been subordinate to Publicity Censorship in the matter of the release or suppression of information relating to their operations or those of associated forces. The effect of the Government's action now was to reverse the position and make Publicity Censorship—and the Australian Defence Services—subordinate to MacArthur's headquarters in the control

<sup>6</sup> *S 42*, US submarine (1924), 850 tons, one 4-in gun, four 21-in torpedo tubes, 11 kts.

<sup>7</sup> Japanese document 16269-A, "The Battle of the Coral Sea"; ATIS translation, 10 Apr 1946.

<sup>8</sup> On 6th May the Advisory War Council recommended that a censorship instruction be issued prohibiting publication in press or broadcasting of any information relating to operations "alleged to have occurred or impending or prospective operations by Australians and Allied forces in the SWPA without the authority of the C-in-C who was responsible for the conduct of operations and the issue of communiqués relating thereto". This was taken as a decision of War Cabinet.

of publicity and of censorship. Furthermore, this control was exercised with a free interpretation of "operations", and often in an arbitrary manner, and was the cause of considerable irritation in both Australian and overseas circles.

Australian newspapers of 9th May, basing their accounts of the Coral Sea actions on official communiqués issued from MacArthur's headquarters,<sup>9</sup> gave Japanese losses as "one aircraft carrier, one heavy cruiser, one light cruiser, two destroyers, four gunboats and a supply ship sunk", with another aircraft carrier probably sunk, and four ships damaged. Four days later Admiral Royle, reporting to the Advisory War Council, gave the American naval losses correctly (though these were not made public at the time), and gave the Japanese losses correctly so far as aircraft carriers were concerned, though with the mistake regarding the identity of *Shoho* ("one aircraft carrier, *Ryukaku*, 15,000 tons, sunk; one aircraft carrier, *Shokaku*, badly damaged"), but included also the two cruisers and two destroyers sunk as in the official—and published—communiqués. It took some time for an accurate profit and loss account to be drawn up.

There was, at the Advisory War Council meeting on 13th May, some criticism of the Allied conduct of the Coral Sea operation, the result of which was felt to be

rather disappointing, the more so as we had ample warning of the enemy's intentions, the prospective date of attack and the strength of his forces. With the advantage of this information we should have been able to concentrate the superior strength necessary to have ensured a complete victory. As it was, an opportunity to inflict losses on the enemy was lost.

Doubt, too, was expressed as to whether the maximum degree of attack by land-based aircraft had been brought to bear to counterbalance the enemy's superiority in aircraft carriers. Commenting on the battle in the House of Representatives, and discussing the dangers threatening the country, the Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, reminded the people that "many men are fighting for Australia today, but those who are not fighting have no excuse for not working".

On 13th May Curtin cabled to Evatt (then in London, where he had recently arrived from Washington) a statement of the Australian Government's viewpoint, based to an extent on an appreciation he had received the previous day from MacArthur. Explaining that it was vital to build up and maintain in Australia strength adequate to repulse any further Japanese attacks similar to the Coral Sea, Curtin wrote:

He [General MacArthur] observes that the essential backbone of the striking power in this action was the aircraft carriers of the task forces which do not belong to his Command, but only entered it for this operation. I hope there is a full appreciation in London and Washington of the grave threat with which we

<sup>9</sup> The issue of these communiqués by General MacArthur led to President Roosevelt making a "strong point that there was too much information coming out of Australia with a possibility that some of it might be of use to the enemy . . . the naval forces in the Coral Sea action were not under MacArthur's command and it was inappropriate for MacArthur to be issuing communiqués in the manner in which he did". Cablegram, Evatt to Curtin, 15 May 1942.

were confronted last week. We knew the strength of the enemy concentration, we knew his intentions, and we knew the prospective date of his attack, yet we were unable to marshal the superior strength to deal him a heavy blow and the whole of his convoy of 24 [sic] transports fell back on Rabaul unscathed. Fortune will not continue to favour us with these opportunities if we do not grasp them.

MacArthur sought additional forces necessary for the defence of Australia to the extent of (navy) two aircraft carriers, (army) an army corps of three divisions fully trained and equipped, (air force) a first-line strength of 1,000 aircraft. He deplored the "Beat Hitler First" strategy, and advocated concentrating upon Japan as the quickest and most effective way to end the war—a policy urged by some Australian newspapers.<sup>1</sup>

Curtin's cable (which was repeated to the Australian Legation, Washington, for President Roosevelt) went on to express the Australian Government's view that "the maximum defensive-offensive" possible should be developed against Japan. The defensive position having been secured, an offensive strategy could be adopted as soon as the necessary forces were gathered. This course of action, it was held, would ensure the security of the South-West Pacific Area; would be the best means of protecting India; and would provide a second front for assistance to the Russians. "Finally, a large-scale offensive could be staged more easily and quickly in the South-West Pacific Area than in any other area." Emphasising the urgency of strengthening Australia as an offensive base "while time and circumstances permit", Curtin concluded that the defence of the South-West Pacific Area was an obligation of the United Nations. "It devolves on them to provide the forces required. Australia is developing its maximum potential, but it is not sufficient, as the Commander-in-Chief has already stated. The deficiency must come from elsewhere and come quickly."

The "Beat Hitler First" strategy was also criticised by Evatt who, in a cable to Curtin on 14th May, said that he believed it contributed "to the rapid Japanese successes in Malaya, Singapore, East Indies, Philippines, Rangoon and Burma". He continued:

The question now is to what extent this strategy has been modified by subsequent events. Public opinion in the United States is very strong as to the necessity of reinforcing in great strength against Japan. I am now satisfied that Admiral King is also very Pacific minded. Nevertheless the other Service Chiefs who laid down a general strategic policy are loath to admit any fundamental error.

There was no fundamental error for them to admit.

Meanwhile the Japanese intended that the setback they had received in the Coral Sea should be only temporary. On 18th May (four days after Evatt had sent the above-mentioned cable to Curtin) a directive was issued to the *XVII Army* commander, Lieut-General Hyakutake, to attack New Caledonia, Fiji, and Samoa, and to continue the attack on Port Moresby by land across New Guinea. The naval invasion force would consist of Vice-Admiral Kondo's *Second Fleet*, of 13 heavy cruisers, 2 light cruisers,

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<sup>1</sup> For example *The Argus*, Melbourne, in an editorial "Liquidate Japan First", and other exhortations.

and 24 destroyers; Vice-Admiral Nagumo's *First Air Fleet* of 7 aircraft carriers and 11 destroyers; and the battleships *Hiyei*, *Kirishima*, *Kongo* and *Haruna*. But this operation never got beyond the planning stage. It was nullified by Admiral Yamamoto's insistence upon the forthcoming Midway operation, which was to rob the Japanese Navy of its main Carrier Attack Force, snatch from it the initiative which it was never to regain, and force upon it—after six months of a spectacularly successful strategy of attack—the distasteful and inescapable defensive role. It was the period of slack water, with the tide about to turn for the Allies.

### CHAPTER 3

## AUSTRALIA'S COASTS RAIDED—HER FLANKS STRENGTHENED

**M**R CURTIN'S cable of 13th May brought a reply from President Roosevelt a week later in which he said that he and his Government shared Australian concern as to the potentialities of Japanese attack on Australia by way of New Guinea; recognised the threat to Australia's Pacific communications covered in part by New Caledonia, Fiji and Samoa; and "cannot lose sight of the fact that neither can Australia be supported nor lines of communications kept open unless Hawaii is securely held". President Roosevelt went on to say:

The air and naval means at the disposal of the United Nations in the Pacific is not yet adequate to hold securely all three of above cited areas simultaneously but Prime Minister and Government of Australia may rest assured that means available will be applied in the critical area in accordance with the most careful and thorough consideration of all the factors of enemy potentialities, his known dispositions and his intentions as they can be deduced or otherwise become known to us.

Such application in a critical area of American means available was soon to be made. Even before Coral Sea, Admiral Nimitz had hints—from various shreds of evidence—of a forthcoming Japanese offensive in the Central Pacific. And, as was learned later, while the Coral Sea Battle was in its early stages—on 5th May—Japanese Imperial Headquarters issued the order for the Combined Fleet, in cooperation with the army, to invade and occupy strategic points in the western Aleutians and Midway Island—the second phase of the eastward-drive plan.

As stated above, the Japanese were not seriously concerned at their setback in the Coral Sea Battle. They had secured Tulagi and considered Moresby would be theirs at will; and they thought they had sunk the two American aircraft carriers. They confidently proceeded with preparations for phases two and three of the plan.

These were, for Admiral Nimitz's staff, the most anxious days of the war. They knew enough of Japanese moves afoot for the declaration of a state of "Fleet Opposed Invasion" in the Hawaiian Sea Frontier on 14th May; on the 15th Admiral King predicted that an expeditionary force for the capture of Midway would leave Guam about 24th May; and on the 20th Nimitz issued an estimate of its strength that "was accurate as far as it went—and even alarming. [The Midway Striking Force was of 4 aircraft carriers, 2 battleships, 2 heavy cruisers, one light cruiser and 16 destroyers; the Occupation Force of 12 transports and screen of 10 destroyers; with a covering group of 2 battleships, 4 heavy cruisers, one light cruiser and 7 destroyers, and a close support group of 4 heavy cruisers, one light cruiser and 2 destroyers; and 16 submarines, and ancillary craft.] What he did not know was that Admiral Yamamoto himself, in the

super-battleship *Yamato*, was to command the main body of the Combined Fleet, comprising three new and four old battleships, three light cruisers, a destroyer squadron and a light carrier, to operate between Midway and the Aleutians and cover both."<sup>1</sup> In addition was a Seaplane Group of two seaplane carriers and ancillaries for the Aleutian Islands, whose supporting force was composed of the four old battleships and two light cruisers detached from Yamamoto's main force.

To oppose these armadas Nimitz could muster no battleships (the nearest, old "Pearl Harbour" ships, were at San Francisco, and the two new ones, *Washington* and *North Carolina*, were in the Atlantic); only three carriers, including *Yorktown*, whose heavy Coral Sea damage was made good in two hectic days at Pearl Harbour, whence she sailed for battle on 31st May (*Saratoga*, repaired after being torpedoed by Japanese submarine *I 6*<sup>2</sup> on 11th January was training her air group at San Diego, and *Wasp* was crossing the Atlantic from the Mediterranean); 7 heavy cruisers; one light cruiser; 14 destroyers and 19 submarines.<sup>3</sup> In this predicament Admiral King sought help from the British in the Indian Ocean, and on 19th May asked the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, "either for a British aircraft carrier to be moved from the Indian Ocean to the South-West Pacific, or for air attacks to be made on Rangoon and the Andaman Islands, or for action to be taken to interrupt Japanese communications between Singapore and Rangoon". Unfortunately, largely because of the time factor, the British were unable to do much towards meeting any of these requests. It was, recorded the British naval historian,

clear from the Admiralty's records that neither the nature nor the quality of the American Navy's intelligence regarding Japanese movements and intentions reached London until the 19th or 20th May. . . . Not until late on the 22nd when, at the First Sea Lord's suggestion, Admiral Little,<sup>4</sup> the head of the British Admiralty Delegation in Washington, had an interview with Admiral King, did the Admiralty become aware that an attack on Midway Island and the Aleutians appeared from intelligence to be a really strong probability. . . . If any misunderstanding arose on this occasion, it seems that it was brought about partly by American slowness in giving the Admiralty the full intelligence of which they were possessed by the middle of May.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Morison, Vol IV, p. 80. This study of the Battle of Midway has been drawn upon for the references to the battle in this volume.

<sup>2</sup> *I 6*, Japanese submarine (1935), 1,955 tons, two 4.7-in guns, 24 kts. Sunk west of Saipan, 13 Jul 1944.

<sup>3</sup> It was not until 10th June that *Wasp*, *North Carolina*, heavy cruiser *Quincy*, light cruiser *San Juan*, and seven destroyers passed through the Panama Canal from the Atlantic—the first substantial reinforcement the American Pacific Fleet received in 1942.

<sup>4</sup> Admiral Sir Charles Little, GCB, GBE; RN, Lord Commissioner of Admiralty and Chief of Naval Personnel 1938-41; Head of British Joint Staff Mission, Washington, 1941-42; C-in-C Portsmouth 1942-45. B. Shanghai, 14 Jun 1882.

<sup>5</sup> Roskill, Vol II, pp. 37-8. The American naval historian recorded of this that "an urgent request to the British Admiralty to lend the Pacific Fleet one of their three carriers then operating in the Indian Ocean, some thousands of miles from the nearest enemy carriers, received the discouraging reply on 19 May that none could be spared, and that their Intelligence reported 'no indication' of an attack on Alaska or the Hawaiian Islands". (Morison, Vol IV, p. 817.) Records disclose no inkling of the American Intelligence regarding Japanese intentions having reached Australia, though Combined Operations Intelligence Centre, Melbourne, recorded on 18th May "from MOST SECRET SOURCES" that "all Intelligence points to a gradual concentration of enemy forces in Home Waters possibly presaging a northward move in the near future. At no time since the outbreak of war has Japan's naval strength in Southern Waters been so reduced."

At this period the British had their hands full in the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean. They still—with memories of the events of April—considered a Japanese descent into the Indian Ocean a strong possibility which had to be guarded against with inadequate forces, and the policy was to retain the fleet in being as a deterrent “whilst the Americans permit as much of the Japanese naval force in the Pacific as they mean to allow”.<sup>6</sup> In the Mediterranean area the Axis threat in Cyrenaica was increasing, and the shortage of supplies in Malta was critical, urgently demanding relief.

At the time, then, when help was sought, and was in part so urgently needed by the Americans because they had kept their two new battleships and *Wasp* on the Atlantic side in order to help their Allies in the Madagascar operation and the nourishment of Malta respectively, the British were able to do but little. The Eastern Fleet's three aircraft carriers—*Indomitable*, *Formidable* and *Hermes*—had been reduced to two by the loss of the last-named in the Bay of Bengal on 9th April. During the first half of May *Indomitable* was temporarily transferred to Admiral Syfret's Force F to reinforce *Illustrious* and his air strength for the assault on Diego Suarez; and the Eastern Fleet itself—with *Formidable*—based on Kilindini, provided cover for the Diego Suarez operation from the vicinity of the Seychelle Islands. French resistance at Diego Suarez ended on 7th May, and the surrender document was signed next day. But Force F afterwards remained there for some days awaiting a decision whether the occupation of Madagascar was to be extended, and it was not until 19th May—the day when Admiral King asked for help—that *Indomitable* and *Illustrious* sailed for Kilindini for refreshment and refit. By that time, even under the most favourable conditions, it would have been impossible for any of the three carriers—*Illustrious*, *Formidable* or *Indomitable*—to have traversed half the world and joined the Pacific Fleet in time to take part in the Battle of Midway. Furthermore, the Eastern Fleet was now about to be denuded of 2 cruisers and 10 destroyers, including the 4 Australian destroyers of the 7th Flotilla, for temporary transfer to the Mediterranean to run a convoy through to Malta from Alexandria. These ships sailed from Kilindini in two groups on 25th and 27th May respectively, Group 1, of H.M. Ships *Birmingham*, *Pakenham*, *Fortune* and H.M.A. Ships *Norman* and *Nizam*; Group 2 of H.M. Ships *Newcastle*<sup>7</sup> (Flag of CS4, Rear-Admiral William Tennant), *Inconstant*,<sup>8</sup> *Paladin*,<sup>1</sup> *Hotspur*, *Griffin*, and H.M.A. Ships *Napier* (D7, Captain S. H. T. Arliss), and *Nestor*. They were in Suez by 6th June, and entered the Mediterranean

<sup>6</sup> “Aide-memoire on Strategy.” Telegram of 28 May 1942 to Australian Prime Minister from Dr Evatt in London.

<sup>7</sup> HMS's *Birmingham*, *Newcastle*, cruisers (1936-7), 9,100 tons, twelve 6-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 32 kts.

<sup>8</sup> HMS *Inconstant*, destroyer (1941), 1,360 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 35½ kts.

<sup>1</sup> HMS's *Pakenham*, *Paladin*, destroyers (1941), 1,540 tons, four 4-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts. *Pakenham* sunk off Sicily, 16 Apr 1943.



on the 7th. However, though unable to reinforce the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Somerville with Force A, the fast section of the Eastern Fleet, sailed from Kilindini at the end of May in a diversionary movement towards Ceylon.

## II

While these moves and preparations were in progress among the major naval forces in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, surface raiders in the Indian Ocean and submarines in the Pacific, made their presence known. Since February there had been attacks on merchant ships—with some success—by Japanese submarines in the eastern Indian Ocean, with their operations gradually carried as far west as East African coastal waters by the five boats of Ishizaki's *8th Squadron* in May and June. But it was not until May that submarine attacks were made on merchant ships in eastern Australian waters. The first of these was on 5th May, when the American *John Adams* (7,180 tons) was torpedoed off New Caledonia. She was set on fire and blew up the next day. On 7th May, also off New Caledonia, the Greek *Chloe* (4,641 tons) was sunk by gun fire from a submarine.

These, however, were probably targets of opportunity taken by a boat on reconnaissance patrol. The Japanese were still adhering to their policy of using submarines against naval targets, and it was for this reason that on 11th May, four large boats of the *8th Squadron*, equipped for carrying midget submarines and three of which, *I 22*, *I 24*, and *I 28*, had taken part in the Coral Sea operation while the fourth, *I 27*, had been on reconnaissance patrol, were ordered to proceed to Truk to embark midget submarines to carry out attacks on naval targets at either Suva or Sydney, according to which offered most fruit. At the same time two boats, *I 21* and *I 29*, which were proceeding to reconnoitre Suva and Sydney respectively, were ordered to continue that mission. This was in pursuance of a plan made some time earlier whereby "Advanced Elements" of the Japanese *Eastern Fleet* would attack enemy naval vessels in the important areas in the South Pacific after the attack on Moresby. With that attack postponed, it was decided nevertheless to proceed with the submarine attacks as originally planned. (This apparently was part of an over-all plan of attack on naval forces in which all the boats of *8th Squadron*—both in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific—were to take part. When a wrecked midget submarine was recovered in Sydney Harbour after the attack there, among documents found in her was portion of a covering letter forwarding appendixes to "Advanced Detachment Secret Operational Order", dated 11th April at Kure in the *8th Squadron* flagship *I 10*, and signed by Ishizaki.)

Of the four boats ordered to Truk one, *I 28*, reached the Caroline Islands, but failed to make Truk. On the morning of 17th May, in the Carolines, she was sighted on the surface, "numerals and men on the bridge plainly visible", by the U.S. submarine *Tautog*,<sup>2</sup> twenty-three days out from Pearl Harbour on her way to Fremantle. An American torpedo

<sup>2</sup> *Tautog*, US submarine (1940), 1,475 tons, one 3-in gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 20 kts.

disabled *I 28*, who replied with gunfire, but "the duel ended when *Tautog* registered a second hit under the enemy's conning tower".<sup>3</sup> By this encounter, the Japanese midget striking power at Sydney Harbour a fortnight later was reduced by one quarter.

The remaining three boats, *I 22* (Commander Kiyoi Ageta), *I 24* (Commander Hiroshi Hanabusa), and *I 27* (Commander Iwao Yoshimura), carrying their midgets clamped to their upper decks, sailed from Truk about 20th May for "the seas south of the Solomon Islands".

In the meantime, on 16th May, came definite evidence to Australian naval authorities of the presence of an enemy submarine nearer home. Previous to this there had been recent sighting reports—three by aircraft at widely spaced points well out in the Coral Sea on 10th May—but at 8.34 p.m. on the 16th an intercepted radio message reported the Russian steamer *Wellen* (5,135 tons) being attacked by gunfire approximately 30 miles east of Newcastle. Merchant sailings from Sydney and Newcastle were at once suspended for 24 hours; the Flag Officer-in-Charge, Sydney, Rear-Admiral G. C. Muirhead-Gould, organised an anti-submarine search with all available A/S craft; and air searches, and surface searches by ships at the time in Sydney—the Dutch cruiser *Tromp*, H.M.A.S. *Arunta*, and U.S.S. *Perkins*—were carried out without finding the enemy. *Wellen* reached Newcastle at 2.30 a.m. on the 17th, having suffered slight damage. Her captain, one officer, and one rating were injured. The submarine had fired seven rounds at 100 yards range, and *Wellen* replied with low angle and machine-gun fire, whereupon the enemy submerged, the flooding of tanks being heard in *Wellen*. The attacker was *I 29*, then in the vicinity for her reconnaissance of Sydney.

Also on 16th May, Navy Office, Melbourne, received a delayed report of enemy activity just without the far western limit of the Australia Station, in the Indian Ocean some 1,400 miles W.N.W. of Fremantle. In the afternoon of 10th May the British s.s. *Nankin* (7,131 tons) which had left Fremantle on the 5th for Colombo, broadcast from that position a raider distress and aircraft attack signal, and that she was being attacked with gunfire and bombs. Sixteen minutes after her initial signal she broadcast "abandoning ship", after which came bleak silence. This wireless intercept was made by the transport *Felix Roussel* in convoy "SU.4" (transports *Holbrook*, *Felix Roussel* and *Duntroon*, with 4,415 troops, escorted by the armed merchant cruiser H.M.S. *Chitral*—15,346 tons) but was not reported until the convoy arrived at Fremantle on 14th May. The next day a Swedish ship which arrived reported having been attacked by a German raider, 1,500 miles west of Fremantle, on 10th May. This raider was presumably *Thor*.<sup>4</sup> Not until long after was *Nankin's* fate known, but it was subsequently learned that she had become the first Indian Ocean victim of *Thor*, the only German raider to operate in the Indian Ocean in the first half of 1942. *Thor* was on her second raiding voyage. Her first, from

<sup>3</sup> Morison, Vol IV, p. 206.

<sup>4</sup> *Thor* (3,934 tons), six 5.9-in guns, four torpedo tubes, 90 mines, 18 kts.

June 1940 to April 1941, had been distinguished by three engagements with British armed merchant cruisers—*Alcantara* (22,209 tons), *Carнарvon Castle* (20,122 tons) and *Voltaire* (13,245 tons)—the last-named of which she sank on 4th April 1941. She sailed from a Biscay port on her second voyage in February 1942, and sank five ships in the South Atlantic between then and mid-April, when she rounded the Cape into the Indian Ocean. Her entry into this area apparently caused some concern to the Japanese, who regarded it as an incursion into their operational zone, and who tried to have her activities restricted to south of the 40th Parallel. But eventually the Germans were permitted to operate *Thor* in the eastern Indian Ocean as far north as 15 degrees south, but she was limited to the west by the 60th Meridian to avoid clashing with Ishizaki's group. Her tactics followed those of *Penguin* in that ship's attack on *Maimoa* eighteen months earlier—with an endeavour by her aircraft to break down the victim's wireless aerials and to augment with bombing the raider's gunfire. *Nankin* was captured (with the loss of two Lascar members of her crew) and taken to Japan by a prize crew, where her survivors were interned as prisoners of war. One more distress message, probably relating to *Thor*, was received. That was on 29th May when the British tanker *Anglo Maersk* (7,705 tons) bound from Sydney to Abadan, broadcast "suspicious vessel following", from the area of *Thor*'s operations. When the tanker's cries ceased, *Thor*'s subsequent activities were shrouded in silence, and only the non-arrival of ships at their destinations hinted at her continued lurking in the ocean spaces.

Back in eastern Australian waters there was, after the *Wellen* incident, a lull in apparent submarine activity for some days. On 18th May *Tromp* and *Arunta*, following their unsuccessful search for *Wellen*'s attacker, left Sydney escorting convoy "ZK.8" of four ships—the Dutch *Bantam* (9,312 tons), *Bontekoe* (5,033 tons), *Van Heemskerk* (2,996 tons) and *Van Heutsz* (4,552 tons)—carrying 4,735 troops of the Australian 14th Brigade to reinforce Port Moresby. They reached their destination without incident at the end of the month. According to a post-war Japanese account, this lull in Japanese submarine activity in the Sydney area was only apparent, and on or about 20th May an aircraft from *I 29* carried out a reconnaissance of Sydney and "confirmed the existence of both battleships and cruisers anchored there".<sup>5</sup> Nothing, however, was known of this reconnaissance in Australia, and the first "post-*Wellen*" indication of any submarine in near Australian waters was a report from the New Zealand Naval Board of indications of an enemy unit, probably a submarine, approximately 460 miles W.N.W. of Auckland (some 700 miles east of Sydney) in the evening of 26th May. Three days later a second New Zealand report indicated the presence of an enemy unit (probably that previously

<sup>5</sup> Japanese document "Submarine Operations during the Second Phase of Operations (April 1942 to August 1942)", prepared by 2nd Demobilization Bureau Remaining Business Liquidation Division, in November 1947. "Outline of Attack on Sydney by Elements of Advanced Section of Eastern Fleet". A British official source says *I 29*'s reconnaissance of Sydney was on 23rd May.

reported) approximately 40 miles E.S.E. of Sydney at 7.10 p.m., Eastern Australian Time, on 29th May.

It is almost certain that this was *I 21*, which had been reconnoitring Suva, and which, on 23rd May, was ordered to Sydney "to carry out reconnaissance immediately prior to an attack".<sup>6</sup> This was because, as a result of the reported presence of battleships and cruisers in Sydney Harbour, the commanding officer of this section of the *8th Squadron*, Captain Hankyu Sasaki, had decided to make them the target. The boats of the flotilla were in position approximately 35 miles north-east of Sydney Heads on the night of the 29th. There were five in all, *I 22* (*Midget No. 21*); *I 24* (*Midget A*<sup>7</sup>); *I 27* (*Midget No. 14*); *I 29* (with or without aircraft which, if with, was probably damaged and unusable); *I 21* (with aircraft).

About 4.20 a.m. on 30th May a Curtiss-type biplane single-float aircraft, burning navigation lights, flew over Man-of-War anchorage in Sydney Harbour, twice circled U.S.S. *Chicago* lying at No. 2 Buoy, and departed due east. The aircraft was heard and seen from Garden Island, and a duty officer there, Lieutenant Wilson,<sup>8</sup> was sent out to *Chicago* to ask if they knew anything about it. He saw *Chicago's* officer of the watch, who replied that it was an American cruiser's aircraft. It was a conclusion that called for reconsideration when it was pointed out that there was no American cruiser other than *Chicago* in the area—and the aircraft was not hers. At the time, however, little significance appears to have attached to the sighting. An air raid warning was issued by Fighter Sector Headquarters at 5.7 a.m., and later reports came in indicating the presence of two unidentified aircraft in the Sydney-Newcastle area, but searches by fighter aircraft failed to bear fruit. The definite Man-of-War anchorage sighting does not appear to have inspired any apprehensions of a submarine—or other sea-delivered—attack on the harbour, or to have initiated any special defence measures.<sup>9</sup>

Within minutes of the Sydney Harbour sighting, away across the Indian Ocean in Diego Suarez Harbour, Madagascar, a similar aircraft circled H.M.S. *Ramillies* lying at anchor. This was at 10.30 p.m. on 29th May but, allowing for the difference in longitude, the two incidents were separated by only 70 minutes in time. The Diego Suarez aircraft was from Ishizaki's flagship *I 10*. At the time it was realised that it must have come from an enemy warship of some sort, the alert was given, and *Ramillies* weighed and steamed around for a while before taking up a different anchor

<sup>6</sup> Possibly *I 21* was ordered to Sydney because *I 29's* aircraft was damaged in the reconnaissance of 20th May. The Japanese report states that, subsequent to the raid on Sydney Harbour, "as the aircraft on both *I 21* and *I 29* were damaged, no reconnaissance could be made".

<sup>7</sup> The actual number of "Midget A" is not known owing to her wreckage not being recovered. She is here designated *Midget A* as identification for the purpose of this account of the raid on Sydney.

<sup>8</sup> Lt-Cdr P. F. Wilson; RANVR. HMAS *Penguin* 1942-43, Navy Office 1943-45, British Pacific Fleet 1945-46. Shipping officer; of Chatswood, NSW; b. Murrumburrah, NSW, 26 Aug 1908.

<sup>9</sup> In his report on the midget submarine attack (B.S. 1749/201/37 of 16th July 1942) Rear-Admiral Muirhead-Gould wrote: "The attack was possibly preceded by aerial reconnaissance which may have been carried out on 29th, 30th and 31st May. A reconnaissance of Sydney Harbour, especially the naval anchorage area, was carried out by one biplane single float-plane at approximately 0420K/30 May."

berth. At nightfall on the 30th, under a clear sky bright with a full moon, two midget submarines, from *I 16* and *I 20*, were launched 10 miles from the harbour entrance. At least one—from *I 20*—entered the harbour, and at 8.25 p.m. scored a torpedo hit on *Ramillies* which caused some damage, and an hour later torpedoed and sank the tanker *British Loyalty* (6,993 tons).

As was learned after the war<sup>1</sup> the Sydney aircraft was from *I 21*. Piloted by Lieutenant Susumo Ito, it took off from a choppy sea in a rising wind, from a position 35 miles north-east of Sydney's North Head at around 3 a.m. on the 30th. Cloud ceiling was at 2,000 feet. Ito flew up the harbour at about 600 feet, saw *Chicago* and "four destroyers" in Man-of-War anchorage, and *Canberra* in adjacent Farm Cove, and flew back to land on the sea alongside *I 21*. In landing on the rough water the aircraft capsized and was sunk, but Ito and his observer reached the submarine with their report of "battleships and cruisers" in the harbour. Sasaki decided to attack with midget submarines on the night of 31st May.

The evening of Sunday, 31st May 1942, was dark and cloudy at Sydney. Outside the Heads the wind was S. by W., of moderate force, the sea rough with a fair swell running. After sunset the coast was dark. The moon was full and rose at 6.13 p.m., but until the middle watch its light was obscured by heavy overcast. Outer South Head and Inner South Head lights were burning, but the main leads were out. There were, however, patches of brightness within the harbour, and floodlights were on at the graving dock site at Garden Island, where work was in progress. Fixed anti-submarine defences consisted of outer and inner indicator loops at the Heads, but the first-mentioned were out of action. At the inner entrance to the harbour there was, in course of construction, an anti-torpedo boom, between George's Head on Middle Head, and Green Point on Inner South Head. The centre portion was completed, but there were gaps at each end, though un-netted piles were in position in the western gap.

The principal naval vessels in the harbour were U.S. Ships *Chicago*, *Perkins*, *Dobbin*,<sup>2</sup> and H.M.A.S. *Bungaree* (minelayer) at buoys in Man-of-war anchorage; H.M.A.S. *Canberra* at No. 1 Buoy in Farm Cove; the armed merchant cruisers *Kanimbla* and *Westralia* across the harbour off Neutral Bay; *Adelaide* alongside on the west side of Garden Island; and the corvettes *Whyalla* and *Geelong*<sup>3</sup> at the oil wharf on the north-west corner of the island; H.M.I.S. *Bombay*<sup>4</sup> at No. 9 Buoy, Man-of-War anchorage; and the Dutch submarine *K 9*<sup>5</sup> fast outside the depot ship

<sup>1</sup> Japanese document "Outline of Attack on Sydney by Elements of Advanced Section of Eastern Fleet"; newspaper interviews with Japanese pilot Susumo Ito (Richard Hughes in *Sydney Sun*, 28 March 1949; Tom Farrell in *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 29 May 1950).

<sup>2</sup> *Dobbin*, US destroyer tender (1924), 7,938 tons.

<sup>3</sup> HMAS *Geelong*, corvette (1941), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts. Lost in collision in north Australian waters, 18 Oct 1944.

<sup>4</sup> HMIS *Bombay*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

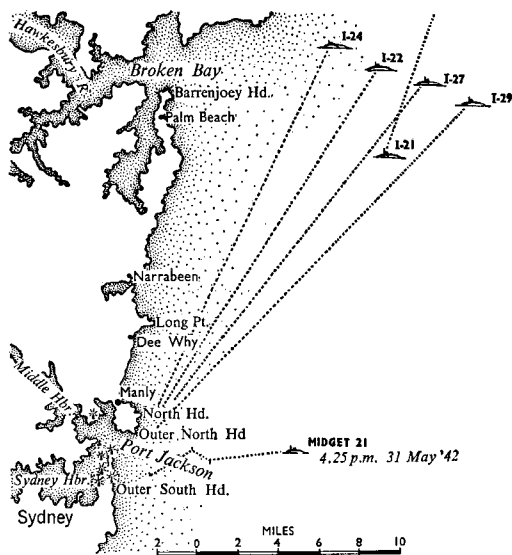
<sup>5</sup> *K 9*, Dutch submarine (1922), 521 tons, one 3.5-in gun, four 17.7-in torpedo tubes, 15 kts.

(converted harbour ferry) *Kuttabul*, lying alongside at the south-east corner of Garden Island.

The available harbour defence craft were the anti-submarine vessels *Yandra* (one 4-inch gun and 31 depth-charges) and *Bingera*,<sup>6</sup> *Yandra* being on duty patrolling within the indicator loop area while *Bingera* was "stand off" ship, lying at No. 7 Buoy in the Naval Anchorage; mine-sweepers *Goonambee* and *Samuel Benbow* in Watson's Bay; four duty (unarmed) naval auxiliary patrol boats, and six channel patrol boats (each armed with two .303 Vickers guns, depth-charge throwers and four to six depth-charges), *Yarroma* and *Lolita* on duty in the vicinity of the boom gates, and *Steady Hour*, *Sea Mist*, *Marlean* and *Toomaree* "stand off" boats at Farm Cove.

The harbour was open to traffic, which was proceeding normally, the ferries running, and ships departing and arriving. The hospital ship *Oranje* passed out through the Heads at 4.4 p.m., and arrivals were *Cobargo* (860 tons) at 5.17, *Erinna* (6,233 tons) at 5.50, *Mortlake Bank* (1,371 tons) at 6.55, and *Wyangerie* (1,068 tons) at 8.53 p.m.

Sunset was at 4.54 p.m. Dusk was approaching over the greying, heaving sea as, around 4 to 4.30 p.m., *I 22*, *I 24*, and *I 27* released their midget submarines some seven miles east of Sydney Heads. The land to the west was silhouetted against the waning light, and the early navigational fixes of the approaching midget craft used bearings of unlighted features—Outer North Head, Middle Head, and the forward main lead through the Heads—indicating that these bearings were taken while there was yet daylight. Later and closer in bearings were of Outer South Head and Inner South Head lights. The first and outermost bearings of *Midget No. 21*<sup>7</sup> placed her in position Outer South Head Light 260 degrees 7.2 miles, and was timed 4.25. Later fixes (untimed) placed her in progressive positions Outer South Head Light 253 degrees 4.1 miles, 247 degrees 3.6 miles, 260 degrees 1.7 miles—this



Sydney Harbour raid. Picking-up positions, May 1942

<sup>6</sup> HMAS *Bingera* (1935), 922 tons, commissioned 5 Feb 1940.

<sup>7</sup> Approach positions marked on a working chart recovered from *Midget No. 21*.

last apparently an "after dark" fix. The other two midgets probably made similar approaches, all being unobserved.

As they stole towards their goal in the swiftly deepening twilight of that May Sunday, the Japanese midget submarines traversed a stretch of water whose surface had been furrowed by another keel on another May Sunday 172 years earlier; and their navigators took bearings of points of land on which the gaze of the first white men to look upon them had, those years before, briefly rested. "At day break on Sunday the 6th May 1770," wrote Captain James Cook in his account of his voyage of circumnavigation,<sup>8</sup> "we set sail from Botany Bay, with a light breeze at N.W. which soon after coming to the southward, we steered along the shore N.N.E., and at noon, our latitude, by observation, was 33 degrees 50 minutes S. At this time we were between two and three miles distant from the land, and abreast of a bay, or harbour, in which there appeared to be good anchorage, and which I called Port Jackson." The third plotted position of *Midget No. 21* on Sunday, 31st May 1942, Outer South Head Light 247 degrees 3.6 miles, placed her in 33 degrees 50 minutes south, between two and three miles distant from the land at North Head—in precisely the position of H.M.S. *Endeavour* at noon on Sunday, 6th May 1770.

The signature of an inward crossing was recorded on an indicator loop at 8 p.m. It was made by *Midget No. 14*, from *I 27*, but at the time, owing to the ferry and other traffic over the loops, its significance was not recognised. Approximately fifteen minutes later Mr J. Cargill, a Maritime Services Board watchman, sighted a suspicious object caught in the anti-torpedo net near the west gate. He and his assistant, Mr W. Nangle, investigated it in a skiff, and reported it to *Yarroma* (Lieutenant Evers<sup>9</sup>) at about 9.30. Apprehension that the object was a magnetic mine deterred *Yarroma* from closing it. She reported "suspicious object in net" at 9.52 p.m., and was ordered to close and give full description, and at 10.20 sent a stoker across in the Maritime Services skiff, while *Lolita* (Warrant Officer Anderson<sup>1</sup>) closed the scene. The stoker reported that the object was a submarine, and at 10.30—one hour after it was first reported to her by Cargill—*Yarroma* signalled to Sydney naval headquarters: "Object is submarine. Request permission to open fire." Five minutes later demolition charges in *Midget No. 14* were fired by its crew, Lieutenant Kenshi Chuma and Petty Officer Takeshi Ohmori, thus destroying both themselves and their craft. Meanwhile, at 9.48, another inward crossing, again taken as of no special import, was recorded on the indicator loop. It was that of *Midget A* from *I 24* (Sub-Lieutenant Katsuhisa Ban and Petty Officer Namori Ashibe).

<sup>8</sup> James Cook, *An Account of a Voyage Round the World*, London, 1773.

<sup>9</sup> Lt-Cdr H. C. Evers, VRD; RANVR. HMAS *Stuart* 1940-42; comd HMAS *Yarroma* 1942-43, *ML's* 813, 812, 426, 1943-45. Shipping clerk; of Balwyn, Vic; b. Balwyn, 21 Sep 1920.

<sup>1</sup> WO H. S. Anderson, RANR. Comd *Lolita* 1941-42; *Baralaba*, *John Oxley*; Boom Laying Officer, Darwin 1944-45. Master mariner (ketches and schooners); of Port Adelaide; b. Port Pirie, SA, 12 Jul 1903.

At 10.27 p.m., and again at 10.36, the general alarm was given by the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Sydney, Rear-Admiral Muirhead-Gould. At 10.20 Captain H. D. Bode, Commanding Officer of *Chicago*, who had been on shore at "Tresco", the official residence of the N.O.I.C., left there for his ships "with the suggestion that he should go to sea with *Perkins*".<sup>2</sup> The 10.27 warning instructed all ships in Sydney Harbour to take anti-submarine precautions, and the port was closed to outward shipping. At approximately 10.50, *Chicago*, lying at No. 2 Buoy, sighted a submarine's periscope (apparently that of *Midget A*) about 500 yards distant. She illuminated it by searchlight and opened fire with red tracer pom-pom. The submarine, steering towards the Harbour Bridge, passed about 200 yards off Garden Island in the path of the dockyard motor boat *Nestor*, which had to alter course to avoid. An observer on Garden Island ferry wharf saw it in *Chicago's* searchlight with the cruiser's shots "falling all round it".

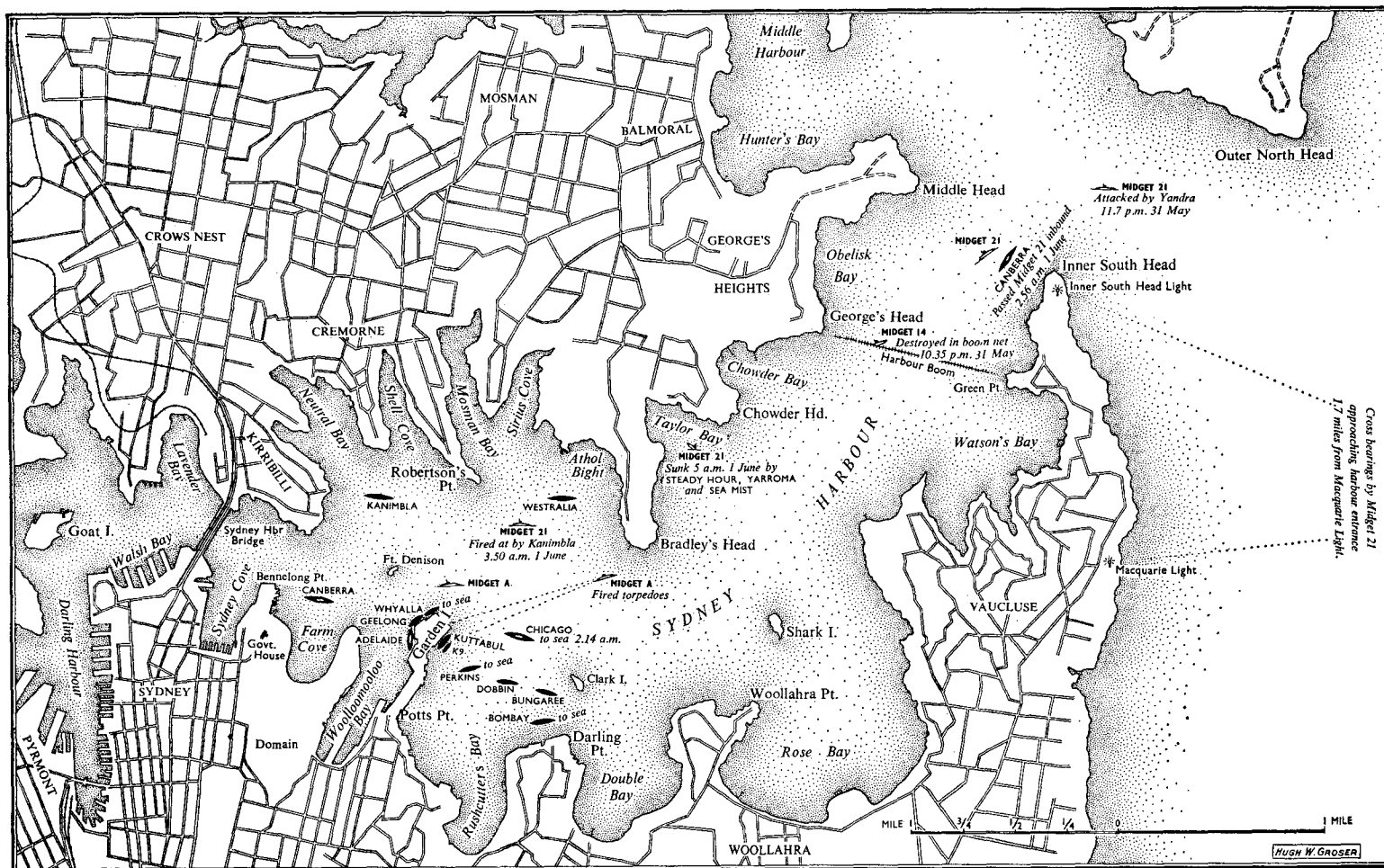
While *Midget A* was thus creating excitement in the harbour, *Midget No. 21*, from *I 22*, was entering the Heads. She did not at this time reach the effective loop, so no loop indicator signature was then recorded by her, but at 10.52 p.m. the naval auxiliary patrol boat *Lauriana*, on duty in the loop area with *Yandra*, sighted "a flurry on the water" ahead. She illuminated with her searchlight *Midget 21's* conning tower 60 to 80 feet distant, and being unarmed she signalled Port War Signal Station and *Yandra*. At 10.54 *Yandra* sighted the submarine's conning tower at a distance of 400 yards, three cables 28 degrees from Hornby Light. She tried to ram the enemy "which appeared 100 yards astern, damaged, and slowly turning to starboard". Contact was lost, but was regained by sighting at 600 yards five minutes later, and at 11.07 *Yandra* attacked with a pattern of six depth-charges. "Submarine was not seen after explosions."

While all this was going on, the ferries continued to run. This was by Muirhead-Gould's direct order, since he felt that "the more boats that were moving about at high speed the better chance of keeping the submarines down till daylight". Ships continued to show lights, and it was not until 11.14 p.m. that the instruction "All ships to be darkened" was issued, and eleven minutes later before the graving dock floodlights were extinguished.

At 11.10 p.m. *Geelong*, from her berth alongside at Garden Island, fired at a suspicious object in the direction of Bradley's Head. This was probably *Midget A*, which had apparently turned toward the north shore after being fired on by *Chicago*, and was there taking up her torpedo firing position with the cruiser—which was silhouetted against the graving dock floodlights—as target. Both *Geelong* and *Whyalla* alongside her, illuminated the Bradley's Head area by searchlight for some time without again sighting the submarine. At 11.25 the graving dock floodlights blacked

<sup>2</sup> "Midget Submarine Attack on Sydney Harbour, May 31st-June 1st 1942." Report by NOCS, Rear-Admiral Muirhead-Gould (B.S. 1749/201/37, 16th July 1942).





Midget submarine raid on Sydney Harbour, 31st May-1st June 1942

out. Five minutes later an underwater explosion wrecked *Kuttabul*, and caused a number of casualties in her.<sup>3</sup> It was subsequently discovered that this was caused by one of two torpedoes which, fired at *Chicago* by *Midget A* from the direction of Bradley's Head, passed under the Dutch submarine *K 9*, and struck the harbour bed beneath *Kuttabul*, where it exploded. The other torpedo ran on shore on Garden Island and failed to explode. Possibly the blacking out of the graving dock floodlights just prior to *Midget A*'s attack was responsible for the cruiser's escape.

The Harbour was now awake (though in the near-by city many people slept soundly through the gunfire and general turmoil, and others thought that naval practice firing was responsible for the disturbance). Ships and craft got moving. *Bingera* slipped, and swept between Bradley's Head and Garden Island; *Perkins* left the Naval Anchorage for sea; the Dutch submarine *K 9* slipped, and proceeded up harbour in tow; *Chicago* made her departure signal from Man-of-War anchorage at 2.14 a.m. on 1st June, and *Whyalla* followed her seawards at 2.30. Also at 2.30 the four "stand off" Channel Patrol Boats in Farm Cove were ordered to proceed on patrol, *Toomaree* to the east boom gate, *Marlean* and *Sea Mist* to the west gate, and *Steady Hour* to join *Lolita* and *Yarroma* at the boom.

At this time it was believed that a third submarine was in the harbour, because an indicator loop crossing was registered at 1.58 a.m., but in the subsequent analysis this was determined as an outward crossing—that of *Midget A*, leaving the harbour after having fired her torpedoes and completed her mission. Almost an hour later than this *Chicago*—whose "proceeding to sea" report from Port War Signal Station at 2.56 a.m. followed *Perkins*' passage through the Heads by sixteen minutes and anticipated that of *Whyalla* by nine—sighted a periscope almost alongside, and signalled "Submarine entering harbour". That was at 3 a.m., and one minute later an inward crossing was registered on an indicator loop. It was presumably *Midget No. 21* making a belated entry after recovering from the depth-charge battering she had received from *Yandra* four hours earlier.

In the sorting out of events in this night of alarms and excursions, considerable difficulty was experienced "in making out any sort of chronological plot. A great many ships and boats and, therefore, people were concerned in these operations, and all were so busy that they had no thought for recording actual time of incidents."<sup>4</sup> There came almost an hour of comparative quiet after 3 o'clock. *Bingera* carried out an anti-submarine patrol in the vicinity of *Canberra* in Farm Cove, whence the four "stand-off" Channel Patrol Boats proceeded on patrol at 3.35 a.m.

H.M.I.S. *Bombay* put to sea on an anti-submarine search. There was a revival of activity at 3.50 when *Kanimbla*, lying at Birt's Buoy in Neutral Bay, suddenly burned a searchlight and opened fire. *Bingera* made a fruitless search of the area. There was another peaceful interlude, broken after

<sup>3</sup> Casualties in *Kuttabul* were: 18 killed, one missing believed killed, 10 wounded.

<sup>4</sup> "Japanese Midget Submarine Attack on Sydney Harbour." Report by NOCS, Rear-Admiral Muirhead-Gould (B.S. 1518/201/37, 22nd June 1942).

an hour by a report from the auxiliary minesweeper *Doomba*, at 4.50, of a submarine contact off Robertson's Point. Again a fruitless search by *Bingera*. At the same time *Canberra* reported an unconfirmed sighting of a torpedo track from the direction of Bradley's Head.

This was the prelude to some three hours of intense activity by *Sea Mist* (Lieutenant Andrew<sup>5</sup>), *Steady Hour* (Lieutenant Townley<sup>6</sup>), and *Yarroma*, all patrolling in the west gate area. At approximately 5 a.m. *Sea Mist*, at the request of minesweeper *Goonambee* (who at 11 p.m. on the 31st had proceeded from Watson's Bay to patrol from Bradley's Head to the west gate) investigated a suspicious object in Taylor Bay. She illuminated it with an Aldis lamp, identified it as a submarine, and made two depth-charge attacks, simultaneously firing red Very lights. These and the explosions brought *Yarroma* hot-foot to the scene, her crew's anticipations whetted by the sight of more Very lights and the sound of additional explosions as she raced in to find *Sea Mist* attacking what that boat reported as "three submarines". *Yarroma* and *Sea Mist* were shortly joined by *Steady Hour*, and from then on until 8.27 a.m. intermittent depth-charge attacks were delivered on submarine contacts recorded by detection gear and by visual "sightings" in that deceptive period of twilight and shadow-borne illusion of a growing dawn. They were conditions under which were seen more submarines than were actually present. But reality existed in the wreck of *Midget No. 21*. It lay on the harbour bed in Taylor Bay, battered by depth-charge explosions, the torpedoes jammed in their tubes, the two crew members—Lieutenant Keiu Matsuo and Petty Officer Masao Tsuzuku—dead and heedless of the faint hum of the motors which kept the propellers still slowly turning, and of the knocking and scraping sounds made by *Steady Hour*'s cable and dragged anchor seeking, finding, and fouling the hull. Chronologically the story of those dawnlight happening runs: 6.40 a.m.—*Steady Hour* dropped two depth-charges and marker buoy. 6.58—*Yarroma* confirmed A/S contact and dropped one charge. 7.18 to 7.25—*Yarroma* and *Steady Hour* attacked A/S contact, oil and air bubbles rose, *Steady Hour* reported her anchor had caught up in the submarine. 8.27 a.m.—*Yarroma* made final depth-charge attack, oil and air bubbles continued to rise.<sup>7</sup>

A diver's investigations that day found *Midget No. 21*, with her engines still running, lying on the harbour floor. Two 30-fathom lengths of 2½-inch wire were shackled to her and, by them, minesweeper *Samuel Benbow* was moored to her for the night. Next day, 2nd June, attempts to drag the submarine inshore by these wires failed, but on 4th June, with the help of sheerlegs and slings, the wreck was warped into shallow water and

<sup>5</sup> Lt R. T. Andrew; RANVR. Comd *Sea Mist*, *Lolita*. Store manager; of Mosman, NSW; b. Sans Souci, NSW, 23 Sep 1910.

<sup>6</sup> Cdr Hon A. G. Townley; RANVR. Comd *Steady Hour* 1941-42, *ML 813* 1942-43, *ML 817* 1943. MHR 1949-63; Minister for Social Services 1951-54, for Air and Civil Aviation 1954-56, for Immigration 1956-58, for Defence 1958-63. Of Hobart; b. Hobart, 3 Oct 1907. Died 24 Dec 1963.

<sup>7</sup> "Midget Submarine Attack on Sydney Harbour, May 31st-June 1st 1942." Report by Rear-Admiral Muirhead-Gould, 16th July 1942.

finally brought on shore. Its occupants were found to have died as the result of self-inflicted revolver shots in the head.<sup>8</sup>

From the remains of the two submarines recovered—the components of which were identical—a complete submarine was constructed. This made a final voyage, on wheels over Australian roads, from Sydney via Goulburn, Canberra, and the Hume Highway to Melbourne, thence by the coast road to Adelaide, and back through inland Victoria—Nhill, Ararat, Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton—and north again by the Hume Highway to Canberra. This “voyage”, of some 2,500 miles, was to let as many Australians as possible see a midget submarine, and also to raise money for the Naval Relief Fund. It was successful on both counts. It ended at 4 p.m. on 28th April 1943, when the submarine, flying the White Ensign (which it did throughout the “voyage”) and now flying a paying-off pendant also, arrived at the Australian War Memorial. There it remains.<sup>9</sup> The bodies of the four Japanese recovered from the two submarines were cremated at Rookwood Cemetery, Sydney. Admiral Muirhead-Gould arranged for the funeral to be carried out with full naval honours, the coffins covered with the Japanese ensign and a volley fired by a naval saluting party, and he himself attended. There was some criticism of this, but the action was typical of the man and his tradition.

So ended the Japanese midget submarine raid on Sydney Harbour. Luck was certainly on the side of the defenders, and was undeserved in the early stages when inactivity and indecision were manifested—the disregard of the aircraft reconnaissance of the harbour on 30th May as possibly presaging an attack from the sea though it was known to be by a ship-borne float-plane, and the failure promptly to react to the discovery of *Midget No. 14* caught in the anti-torpedo net. Nearly two-and-a-quarter hours elapsed from the initial sighting of this midget by Cargill at 8.15 p.m. and the first “general alarm” issued by Muirhead-Gould at 10.27 to all ships to take anti-submarine precautions. By then, *Midget A* had been in the harbour, undetected, for more than half an hour. From the time of the initial sighting of *Midget No. 14* to that when the four “stand off” Channel Patrol Boats were ordered on patrol, six-and-a-quarter hours elapsed, and another hour passed before they actually proceeded—four hours after *Kuttatubul* was sunk.

Some years later Lieutenant Wilson who, as mentioned, was duty officer (Intelligence) on Garden Island on the night of the raid, recalled events

<sup>8</sup> Examination of the wrecks of *Midgets Nos. 14 and 21* and of their contents, led to the conclusion that, in favourable circumstances, it would be possible for one of these craft to operate in a suitable harbour for a period up to one week, and to remain submerged for at least 12 hours. General habitability would be the most serious problem to overcome, and it would have been necessary for the crew to get out of the submarine for periods if the cruise were to be protracted. The midgets contained food rations and bottles of mineral waters, whisky, and wine. A typical meal (1,300 calories) was of soda biscuits, dried bonito, pickled plums, peas, chocolate and caramels. Charts of Sydney and Newcastle harbours were carried, and target photographs including Garden Island and Cockatoo Island Dockyard in Sydney; the Hawkesbury River railway bridge; and the steelworks, floating dock, and Walsh Island shipyard, in Newcastle.

<sup>9</sup> For a full description of this overland journey see “A Maiden Voyage in Uncharted Waters” by Lt-Cdr J. S. Bovill, *H.M.A.S. Mk. II* (1943), pp. 89-96.

in a letter to the author. Of the air reconnaissance by Ito on 30th May he wrote:

The first sighting was made by the army artillery battery at George's Heights, Middle Head, who were lulled into a sense of false security by the plane's American markings and type. They reported the sighting by telephone to me, adding "there is no cause for alarm as it is an American Curtiss Falcon float plane". . . . I was quite aware that *Chicago's* planes were on its deck and that no other American cruiser was anywhere in the vicinity. . . . With the approval of Lieut-Commander Mills<sup>1</sup> (S.O.I.) I proceeded to *Chicago* and frightened the wits out of the Deck Officer.

Wilson attributed much of the difficulties of the defence to lack of efficient communications.

This factor was the one great hindrance to the efficient working of naval operations. Signals from Channel Patrol Boats patrolling the area of the Heads and net came to us through Port War Signal Station. This was not fast enough. . . . After issuing warnings to all concerned, and doing the many things necessary to get into action, the admiral (Muirhead-Gould) ordered me to get the dockyard lights out. They were on tall masts lighting the whole area. I could not raise the dockyard by telephone so the admiral sent me off on foot. Paul Revere had a more comfortable trip than I did. I ran at full speed across a rough and rocky dockyard road into the dock and through the work sheds. As I went through I shouted to all and sundry, "Get out fast, the port is under attack." Some delay occurred finding the engineer responsible, and with authority to put the lights out. When I found him, he found it hard to believe, and spoke of the difficulty with hundreds of men in the dock, many below sea level. I left him in no doubt of the admiral's requirements, and he sent word to evacuate the dock, and prepared to turn off the main switches. I ran back and it was only a few minutes after I reported that the torpedo exploded under *Kuttabul*. . . . I believe that had the lights not been put out, *Chicago* would have been torpedoed.

Other factors mentioned by Wilson were:

Channel Patrol Boats were anchored in Farm Cove on the other side of Macquarie's Point, and they were unable to see visual signals from Garden Island. Long delay occurred sending messages by launches. . . . Very few C.P.B.'s carried depth charges. . . . All concerned in the port did as well as communications, craft, and armaments permitted. They should be applauded. . . . Though records show that the four "stand off" C.P.B.'s in Farm Cove were not ordered to proceed until 2.30 a.m. on 1st June, I am sure they were away and in the vicinity of the Heads before midnight on 31st May.

Events in Sydney contrasted with happenings in Diego Suarez where, though the appearance of the reconnaissance aircraft on 29th May was correctly interpreted as indicating the near presence of an enemy warship, and precautions were taken to safeguard *Ramillies*, that ship was subsequently torpedoed and damaged, and *British Loyalty* torpedoed and sunk. Apparently nothing was known in Australia at the time of the Diego Suarez attack. The Japanese reconnaissance aircraft was over that harbour and *Ramillies* at 10.30 p.m. 29th May, local time (38 hours 45 minutes before *Midget No. 14* was discovered in the net at Sydney), and *Ramillies*

<sup>1</sup> Lt-Cdr C. F. Mills; RAN. SO Int HMAS's *Lonsdale* 1939-41; *Penguin* 1941-42; comd HMAS *Pirle* 1942-43; SO Demob & Planning *Lonsdale* 1944-47. Public servant; b. Roma, Qld, 28 Sep 1903, Died 11 Mar 1947.

was torpedoed at 8.25 p.m. local time on 30th May (16 hours 50 minutes before *Midget No. 14* was first discovered). Had these facts and their relationship been known in Australia, as there was ample time for them to be known, it might have alerted the Australian naval authorities to the likelihood of a midget submarine attack following the aerial reconnaissance of Sydney Harbour. Approximately 18 hours after *Midget No. 14* was first discovered, the Naval Board told the Admiralty by signal of the Sydney attack, and six hours later the Admiralty issued a general warning to British naval authorities throughout the world, mentioning the Sydney attack and admonishing with "Every possible precaution is to be taken." But there is no record of Australian naval authorities having, up to then, been told of the Diego Suarez attack.

Once the defending craft in Sydney got into action, they put up a good performance, and the work of *Yandra* and *Lauriana* in the late hours of 31st May in their attacks on *Midget No. 21*, and the attacks by *Sea Mist*, *Yarroma*, and *Steady Hour* which resulted in that midget's destruction<sup>2</sup> in the early hours of 1st June, weigh heavily on the credit side of the night's profit and loss account. Perhaps the summing up of an American naval officer<sup>3</sup> came near the mark when he wrote: "So, by a combination of good luck and aggressive counter-attack, an extremely well-conceived enemy operation succeeded only in underlining to the embattled Australians their front row seat in the Pacific War." Though it was a particularly heavy underlining to the victims in *Kuttabul*.

### III

In the South-West Pacific and the western Indian Ocean the two divisions of the Japanese *8th Submarine Squadron* had, in the few hours between 29th May and 1st June, expended their planned means of attack on Allied war vessels—the midget submarines—and, consistent with Japanese submarine policy, they now embarked on a limited campaign against merchant ships.<sup>4</sup> The first intimation of this was at 10.18 p.m. on 3rd June when the Australian coastal steamer *Age* (4,734 tons), bound from Melbourne to Newcastle, reported being under gunfire from a submarine in position 35 miles S.E. of Norah Head. An hour and a half later Sydney radio intercepted a signal from the coaster *Iron Chieftain* (4,812 tons), on passage from Newcastle to Whyalla, reporting that she was torpedoed 27 miles east of Sydney, approximately five miles from where *Age* was

<sup>2</sup> In his report of 22nd June Muirhead-Gould wrote: "From a preliminary examination of the evidence, I reported that I considered *Steady Hour* was responsible for the sinking of No. 4 submarine [it was originally believed, from the first study of the loop crossing signatures, that four midgets took part in the attack] in Taylor Bay. Further investigation shows that *Yarroma* and *Sea Mist* were equally concerned in this attack."

<sup>3</sup> Lt-Cdr J. Burke Wilkinson, USNR, in an article "Sneak Craft Attack in the Pacific", in *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, March 1947, p. 281.

<sup>4</sup> Hashimoto, in *Sunk*, pp. 70-1, suggests that this was intended to be part of a more ambitious plan. "In June 1942 it was planned to try to weaken the resolve of the enemy to fight by carrying out large-scale commerce destruction in the Indian Ocean and Australian areas, and also with the idea of wiping out the effect of defeat of Midway. However, the enemy chose this moment for his counter-attack in the Solomons and most of our submarines had to concentrate in this area to counteract this. Nevertheless small forces continued to operate in the Indian Ocean and Australian areas and the 8th Submarine Squadron proceeded with these operations on completion of the midget attacks at Sydney and Diego Suarez."

attacked. *Age*, unharmed, reached Newcastle shortly before 1 a.m. on the 4th. *Iron Chieftain*, loaded with coke, and with important material for ships building at Whyalla, sank in about five minutes with the loss of twelve of her company, including the master, Captain L. Haddelsey, and the third mate, Mr A. Kennedy, who were on the bridge at the time. *Iron Chieftain* left Newcastle soon after 10 a.m. on the 3rd, to meet a strong south-easterly wind, high sea, and heavy swell which kept her speed down to five or six knots. The weather gradually improved, and at the time of the attack she was making about nine knots. According to survivors' reports the submarine (possibly *I 21*, which was operating in this area<sup>5</sup>) was sighted, on the surface, from the bridge of *Iron Chieftain* some minutes before the attack. A bridge lookout said: "I saw the skipper and the third mate watching the submarine. They watched it for five or six minutes." It was on the port side, and suddenly "the skipper cried 'Hard a'starboard'." Apparently before the ship could swing, the torpedo struck on the port side amidships. Twelve survivors, including the chief officer, were taken from a raft at 3.30 a.m. on 4th June by H.M.A.S. *Bingera*. At 6 a.m. on 5th June the remaining survivors—25 in all—landed on the beach at The Entrance, Tuggerah Lakes, from the ship's starboard lifeboat under the command of the second officer.

In this way the war struck suddenly at the Australian merchant service after eighteen months of immunity in Australian waters since the events at Nauru in December 1940. Officers and men reacted well, and in the fine tradition of their calling; and their behaviour, and that of their colleagues who were to suffer similarly in succeeding months, offset such slur as had attached to the merchant seamen through the actions of individuals who were not typical of the strong heart that ran through the service.<sup>6</sup>

When news of these attacks arrived, the ports of Sydney and Newcastle were closed to outward traffic; ships at sea were warned to zigzag; and surface and air searches were carried out. There was swift evidence that the enemy campaign was geographically extensive. Just before dawn on 4th June, and some 270 miles south of the two earlier attacks, the steamer *Barwon* (4,240 tons) from Melbourne to Port Kembla, was attacked by gunfire and torpedo in position 33 miles S.S.E. of Gabo Island. She suffered no damage or casualties, though fragments of the torpedo, which exploded close alongside, came on board the ship. At 7 a.m. the coastal passenger steamer *Canberra* (7,710 tons) reported sighting a "suspicious object probably submarine" off Cape Moreton, Queensland, about 600 miles north of the scene of the attack on *Barwon*.

<sup>5</sup> Hashimoto, p. 257, though he does not credit her with any sinkings at this time. Two survivors, the second mate and an able seaman, thought that two submarines were present; but this was possibly a deception of the darkness and rough seas. A British official source says the submarine concerned was *I 24*.

<sup>6</sup> In a report on the loss of *Iron Chieftain*, made at the time, the Superintendent Engineer of the Newcastle Steel Works wrote: "In my opinion Mr Brady, 2nd officer, made an excellent job in getting those under his care to land. He was most reluctant to surrender his charge to the police who had to threaten him with violence if he did not go to bed and warm up. Altogether these men did well, in great contrast to recent events."

*Canberra's* sighting could have been of *I 29* which operated, without success, off Brisbane at this period.<sup>7</sup>

At 4.45 p.m. on the 4th, back south again off Gabo Island, a Hudson aircraft of No. 7 Squadron, from Bairnsdale, on reconnaissance and anti-submarine patrol, sighted three merchant ships within a radius of six miles of the position of *Barwon's* encounter. As the aircraft approached, one of these ships was torpedoed and "blew up in front of their eyes".

Shortly afterwards an enemy submarine surfaced some distance from the vessel and the pilot immediately dived to the attack, dropping two anti-submarine bombs across the conning tower. This left only two general-purpose bombs with which to complete the kill and as it would have been courting disaster to release the bombs under 500 feet the captain made an ascent as quickly as possible to prepare for a second attack. In the meantime the submarine, which had been trying vainly to crash-dive (apparently it had been damaged by the A/S bombs) succeeded in getting under water and could not be located.<sup>8</sup>

The torpedoed ship was the *Iron Crown* (3,353 tons) which, with a cargo of manganese ore, left Whyalla for Newcastle on 30th May. Struck on the port side just abaft the bridge the ship, which was not zigzagging, doomed by her heavy deadweight cargo, sank within a minute. There was no time to lower boats, and of the 42 of her complement 37—including the master, Captain A. McLellan, and all officers except the 4th engineer—were lost. The five survivors were picked up two hours and a half later by s.s. *Mulbera* (9,100 tons). The attacker in this instance was probably *I 24*, which is reported to have sunk three ships south of Sydney in this period.<sup>9</sup> Eight hours after the sinking of *Iron Crown* came another attack farther north when, a few minutes before 1 a.m. on 5th June s.s. *Echunga* (3,362 tons), bound from Whyalla to Port Kembla, was chased by a submarine when 17 miles S.E. of Wollongong. The submarine (possibly *I 24*) bothered the merchant ship for one hour, for part of which it was submerged after *Echunga* fired one round from her gun. Eventually the quarry was joined by H.M.A.S. *Kalgoorlie*, which escorted her safely to Port Kembla.

While these happenings were in progress in eastern Australian waters, other events, premonitory, decisive, or normal in the course of war, were shaping in Australia's near north and on distant eastern and western flanks. On 3rd June a Japanese aircraft several times circled the bay and Government station at Buna, on the north coast of the "tail" of New Guinea, directly opposite Port Moresby across country. On the same date, far away to the mist-laden north-east, Japanese aircraft raided Dutch Harbour in the Aleutian Islands in the opening phase of the Battle of Midway and on the eve of the decisive day of that decisive battle. On 5th June came the first intimation of renewed Japanese activity in the Indian Ocean. The British *Elysia* (6,757 tons) was attacked and sunk by the surface raiders

<sup>7</sup> Hashimoto, p. 257.

<sup>8</sup> From R.A.A.F. "Maritime Trade Protection Narrative", Phase Four, The Japanese Submarine Campaign, p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> Hashimoto, p. 257.



*Aikoku Maru* and *Hokoku Maru*, 350 miles E.N.E. of Durban. Also on the 5th came evidence of the activity of Ishizaki's 1st Division of the 8th Submarine Squadron. On that date units of the division sank three Allied ships in the Mozambique Channel between Madagascar and Portuguese East Africa. The next day two more ships fell victims in the Mozambique Channel; and another three were claimed on the 8th, one of these well to the north off Mombasa and the other in the channel. The submarines were widespread in these encounters, and the two farthest-spaced attacks were approximately 1,000 miles apart.

Swift moves were made to counter the attacks on the Australian coast. Pending the institution of convoys, the Naval Board, on 4th June, suspended merchant ship sailings from all ports between Adelaide and Brisbane, excepting Adelaide-Melbourne and Melbourne-Tasmania traffic. Coastal convoys were instituted on 8th June with the sailing of convoy "CO.1" (Newcastle-Melbourne) of nine ships escorted by H.M.A. Ships *Arunta* and *Kalgoorlie*, and convoy "GP.1" (Sydney-Brisbane) of five ships escorted by U.S.S. *Selfridge*<sup>1</sup> and H.M.A.S. *Rockhampton*.<sup>2</sup> In brief, the convoy system then instituted was as follows. On the main coastal routes ships of over 1,200 tons and less than 12 knots were sailed in convoys "CO" (Newcastle-Melbourne) and "OC" (Melbourne-Newcastle); "PG" (Brisbane-Sydney) and "GP" (Sydney-Brisbane). With the exception of "OC" convoys, all had a minimum of two anti-submarine escorts, and anti-submarine air cover was provided.<sup>3</sup> Ships of less than 1,200 tons sailed independently on inshore routes, and ships faster than 12 knots also sailed independently. All ships sailing independently were instructed to zigzag when within 200 miles of the coast except when navigating inside the Barrier Reef. Ships of less than 12 knots east-bound trans-Tasman from Sydney were escorted in convoy for 200 miles from the New South Wales coast; those over 12 knots sailed independently. Ships under 12 knots east-bound trans-Tasman from Melbourne proceeded in "OC" convoys until north of latitude 36 degrees 30 minutes south, thence on independent routes; those of over 12 knots sailed independently west and south of Tasmania.

On Monday, 8th June, the Japanese submarines varied their attacks on the east coast of Australia by carrying out brief bombardments of Sydney and Newcastle. At 12.15 a.m. the Sydney examination vessel, H.M.A.S. *Adele*, sighted flashes of gunfire about nine miles S.E. by S. of Macquarie

<sup>1</sup> *Selfridge*, US destroyer (1936), 1,850 tons, five 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 37 kts.

<sup>2</sup> HMAS *Rockhampton*, corvette (1941), 650 tons, one 3-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>3</sup> Initial escort vessels allocated were: Melbourne—HMAS *Moresby*; Sydney—HMA Ships *Bingera*, *Doomba*, *Rockhampton*, *Yandra*, *Whyalla*, *Kybra*, *Arunta*, *Kalgoorlie*, and HMIS *Bombay*; Brisbane—two destroyers nominated by C.T.F. 44.

There were other convoy designations, i.e.: "LQ" Brisbane-Gladstone; "QL" Gladstone-Brisbane; "TD" Thursday Island-Darwin; "DT" Darwin-Thursday Island; "BV" Brisbane-Townsville; "VB" Townsville-Brisbane; "TN" Townsville-New Guinea; "NT" New Guinea-Townsville. The foregoing list does not include various short-term coastal series.

During 1942 a total of 1,672 ships were included in 252 convoys, these being as follows with numbers of convoys and ships respectively following convoy designations: "OC" convoys, 57-533; "CO" convoys, 58-605; "GP" convoys, 29-152; "PG" convoys, 29-99; Queensland coastal, 38-116; mainland-New Guinea, 41-167.

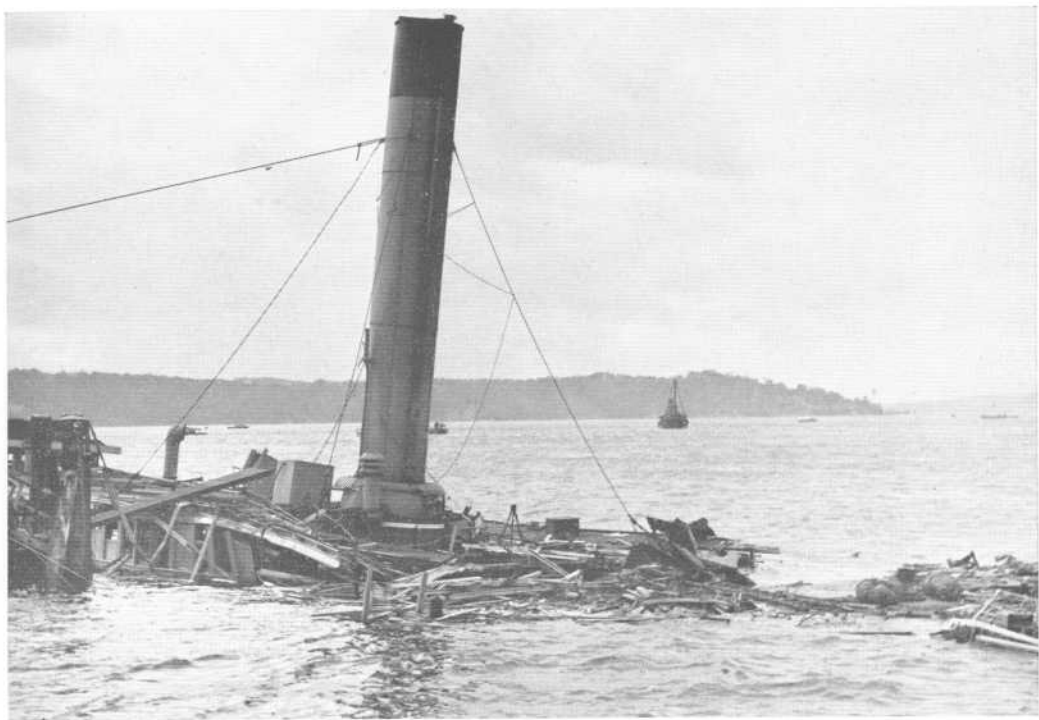
Light, and approximately four miles east of Cape Banks. Between then and 12.20 a.m., ten shells, only four of which exploded, one harmlessly, fell in the Rose Bay and Bellevue Hill areas. They were from I 24. Little beyond a token gesture was achieved. Five minutes afterwards an air raid warning was sounded when an unidentified aircraft was reported over the city, and coastal navigation lights were temporarily extinguished. A submarine, sighted off North Head at 12.45 a.m., headed north, but a subsequent air search was fruitless. At 1 a.m., an air alert was sounded at Newcastle when an unidentified aircraft was reported there, the "All Clear" being given 25 minutes later. At 2.15 a.m. shells were fired from position 7,000 yards N.E. by E. of Fort Scratchley, and during the next 20 minutes some 24 fell in the vicinity of the power station and Customs House. A number failed to explode. Some damage was caused, though there were no casualties. The bombardment ceased when Fort Scratchley fired four rounds in reply. The bombarding vessel in this instance was I 21.<sup>4</sup>

I 24 was presumably responsible for a gunfire attack on the steamer *Orestes* (7,748 tons), bound from Sydney to Melbourne, which reported being shelled just before 1 a.m. on 9th June about 90 miles south of Sydney. She suffered some hits and was set on fire, but reached Melbourne safely on the 10th. She was one of those, over 12 knots, sailing independently. Convoy did not necessarily bring immunity from attack, however, and a straggling ship was in danger of falling a victim, as was illustrated on 12th June. Convoy "CO.2", Newcastle to Melbourne, of eight ships escorted by U.S.S. *Perkins* and H.M.A.S. *Whyalla*, left Newcastle on 11th June, and at 1 a.m. on the 12th was approximately 40 miles N.E. of Sydney, speed of advance eight knots. The atmosphere was clear and visibility good, there was a gentle wind, smooth sea, and slight S.S.E. swell. The Panamanian steamer *Guatemala* (5,967 tons) was straggling behind the rest of the convoy, and at 1.15 a.m. *Perkins* saw the flash of an explosion from her direction. *Guatemala* was making about seven knots at the time. About 1 a.m. the Norwegian master, Captain A. G. Bang, and the Chinese second officer, heard two gunshots to starboard, but saw nothing. At 1.15 the second officer saw the track of a torpedo close to, to starboard. "Hard a'port" was ordered, but too late to evade the torpedo, which struck on the starboard side abreast No. 1 hatch. The crew took to the boats and stood by for an hour, when contact with the ship was lost. She sank about 2.30 a.m. on the 12th. There were no casualties, and the whole complement of 51 were picked up by H.M.A.S. *Doomba* and landed at Sydney.

The attack on *Guatemala* was the last on the Australian coast during June 1942. The following lull in Japanese submarine activities there corresponded with a similar lull in the western Indian Ocean. On 11th June Ishizaki's submarines sank two ships in the Mozambique Channel, and repeated that performance on the 12th. After this there was a lull

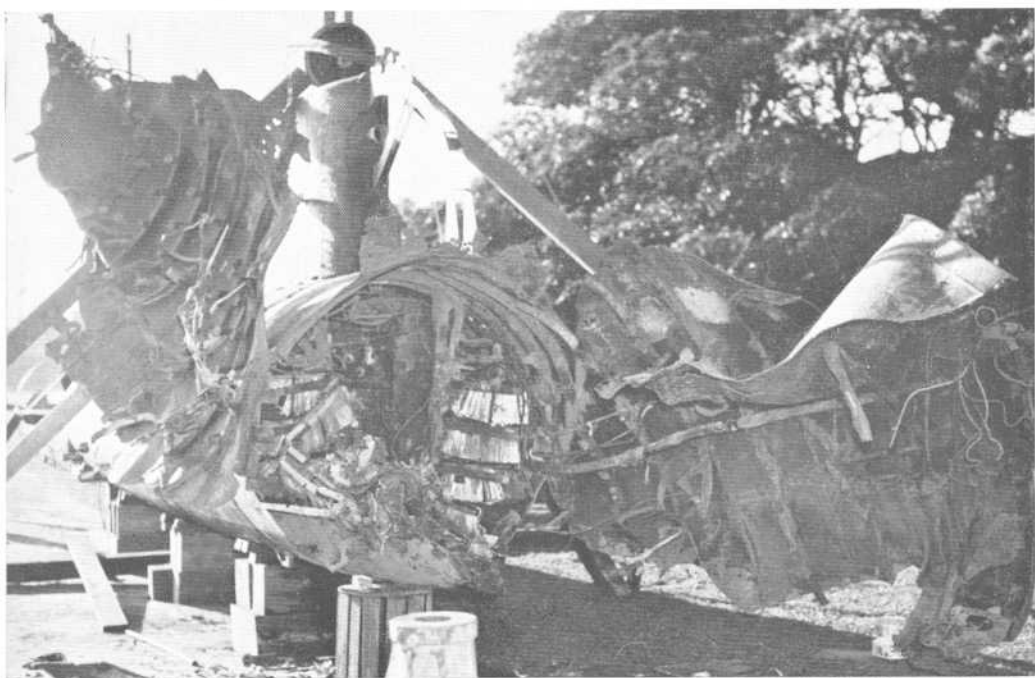
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<sup>4</sup> Hashimoto, pp. 58-9.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Wreck of *Kuttabul* after the Japanese midget submarine attack on Sydney Harbour,  
night 31st May-1st June 1942.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Wreck of Japanese midget submarine *No. 14*, looking aft and showing effects of  
demolition charge.



(U.S. Navy)

The Japanese cruiser *Mogami*, damaged by American aircraft attacks at Midway, 6th June 1942.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

H.M.A.S. *Nestor* sinking after explosion of demolition charges, 16th June 1942.

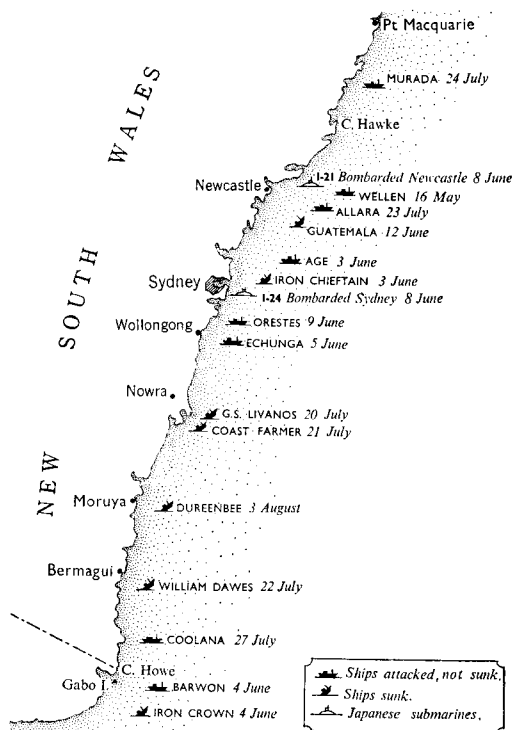
there until 28th June. On that date one ship was sunk, and another on the 29th, both in the Mozambique Channel.

During June, the boats of the *8th Squadron* operating in Australian waters, and Ishizaki's submarines and the two surface raiders in the western Indian Ocean, sank a total of 19 merchant ships aggregating 90,255 tons—three ships of 14,132 tons in Australian waters, and 16 of 76,123 tons in the western Indian Ocean. As in the midget submarine operations, Ishizaki's boats had more success than those on the Australian coast. They operated in an area of dense traffic, most of which, because of shortage of escorts, was of ships sailing independently. At this time Admiral Somerville and the fast section of the Eastern Fleet, including *Warspite*, *Illustrious* and *Formidable*, were in the central Indian Ocean, where they had sailed on the diversionary move to help the Americans in the Battle of Midway; and the fleet had, meanwhile, been denuded of valuable anti-submarine forces in the two cruisers and ten destroyers detached for temporary service in the Mediterranean.

Rear-Admiral Danckwerts, Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, at Kilindini, who was responsible for the protection of ships in the Mozam-

bique Channel, had little to call on for trade protection—five cruisers, and two armed merchant cruisers, with only three corvettes and five destroyers—some with engine defects—for anti-submarine work.

Also during June came another whisper from mid-ocean of German raider activities. On the 10th the cargo liner *Coptic* (8,533 tons) reported being followed by two suspicious ships about 1,400 miles due south of Colombo. Nightfall's cloak of darkness enabled her to lose them. They were probably the raider *Thor*, and either the captured *Nankin* or the supply ship *Regensburg*, with both of which *Thor* was in company about this time and place. Another hint of *Thor*'s activity came at the end of



Japanese submarines on the Australian coast, 1942

June when, on the 27th, two ships were reported overdue at Fremantle. Both were tankers—*Olivia* (6,240 tons), which sailed from Abadan on 27th May, and *Herborg* (7,892 tons) which had left the oil port on 29th May. No word was received from either, but later it was learned that *Olivia* was set on fire and destroyed by *Thor* on 14th June, four days after *Coptic's* encounter and 230 miles S.S.W. therefrom; and that the raider captured *Herborg* on 19th June, 130 miles south of where she destroyed *Olivia*.<sup>5</sup>

#### IV

In the last days of May 1942 there originated widely dispersed naval movements which, though directed towards differing objectives, had something in common. On the 25th of the month, with his departure from the northern Japanese port of Ominato, Rear-Admiral Kakuta, commanding the *Second Mobile Force* (light carriers *Ryujo* and *Junyo*, two heavy cruisers, and destroyers), the force to strike at the Aleutians, made the gambit in the Japanese operation for the occupation of Midway, and the western chain of those northern islands. Also on the 25th, Group 1 Mediterranean Reinforcements (H.M. Ships *Birmingham*, *Pakenham*, and *Fortune*, and H.M.A. Ships *Norman* and *Nizam*) sailed from the East African port of Kilindini. Their objective was to be Malta, with a convoy for the relief of that island.

Lying in the Pacific Ocean, 1,135 miles W.N.W. of Pearl Harbour, Midway—excepting the small, unoccupied Kure Atoll 60 miles to its westward—is the farthest west of the Hawaiian chain of islands. An atoll, only six miles in diameter, and with but a few acres of dry land on two islets, it held during the war an importance bestowed by its geographical position and its ability to accommodate an airfield. Aptly described by Admiral Nagumo in his subsequent report on the battle for its possession as “a sentry for Hawaii”, it was also a valuable forward fuelling base for U.S. submarines in their campaign against enemy shipping in near-Japanese waters. Its possession was thus of consequence to the Americans, and was ardently desired by the Japanese not for reasons of denial alone, but because in Japanese hands it would be a key-point in their extended eastern perimeter. And, as stated above, outweighing other considerations in his mind, Admiral Yamamoto saw a Japanese threat to it as the bait which would lure the U.S. Pacific Fleet into his hands.

Lying in the Mediterranean 850 miles W.N.W. of Alexandria, Malta's position and relationship to the opponents in that sea were analogous to those of Midway in the Pacific. It was, for the British, a sentry for North Africa, and an invaluable base for submarines and aircraft in attacks on Axis shipping. For the Axis forces it would have provided the bridge across the Mediterranean narrows leading to North African victory and

<sup>5</sup> *Olivia* was shelled and set on fire after dark. One DEMS gunner who escaped from the blazing tanker was taken on board the raider. Four Europeans and eight Chinese escaped in a boat. Four of them, three Europeans and one Chinese, survived and reached Madagascar—over 1,500 miles distant—on 14th July. *Herborg's* crew was taken on board the raider, and the ship sent to Japan in prize.

the unlocking of the gate to the East. Its retention by the British was thus as of great moment to them as that of Midway was to the Americans, and to the European members of the Axis it offered as desirable a prize as did that atoll to their Pacific partners.

Both British and Americans were aware of the threats to these key islands, the British by hard practical experience, and the Americans by the forewarning of Intelligence. Both were therefore able to take preparatory counter-measures. The British moves from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean were towards an attempt to run nourishing convoys through to Malta. American moves were in response to those it was anticipated the Japanese would make—and, as stated above, anticipation ran close to realisation.

The day after the Japanese *Second Mobile Force* left Ominato, Admiral Nagumo's *First Mobile Force* (4 carriers, *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Hiryu*, *Soryu*; 2 battleships; 2 heavy cruisers, and destroyers) sortied from the Inland Sea. They were followed on the 27th from Saipan by the Midway Occupation Force under the command of Vice-Admiral Kondo, comprising Kondo's covering group of 2 battleships, 4 heavy cruisers and destroyers; Rear-Admiral Tanaka's transport group of 12 transports carrying about 5,000 naval landing forces and army detachments; and (from Guam) Rear-Admiral Kurita's close support group of 4 heavy cruisers, and destroyers. Also on the 27th, American Rear-Admiral Robert A. Theobald's main force of 5 heavy cruisers and 4 destroyers arrived at Kodiak, Alaska, while a Japanese occupation force it was intended to counter sailed from Ominato for Kiska, in the western Aleutians. Simultaneously, far away in the western Indian Ocean, Group 2 Mediterranean Reinforcements (H.M. Ships *Newcastle*, *Inconstant*, *Paladin*, *Hotspur*, and *Griffin*, and H.M.A. Ships *Napier* and *Nestor*) sailed from Kilindini; and Admiral Somerville's fast division of the Eastern Fleet set out eastwards towards Ceylon in its diversionary move to help the American Pacific Fleet in its coming encounter. On 28th May Admiral Yamamoto, with the main Japanese force of 7 battleships (with the mighty *Yamato* as flag), light carrier *Hosho*, 2 seaplane carriers, light cruisers, and destroyers, steered eastwards from the Inland Sea, and occupation forces intended for Attu and Adak Islands in the Aleutians, sailed from Ominato. On that day, too, the American main force to dispute the enemy's Midway aspirations sailed from Pearl Harbour—Rear-Admiral Raymond A. Spruance's Task Force 16—the carriers *Enterprise* and *Hornet*, 6 heavy cruisers, and destroyers. On the 30th, Rear-Admiral Fletcher's Task Force 17, the hurriedly repaired *Yorktown*, with 2 heavy cruisers, and destroyers, followed Spruance from the American base. The Battle of Midway's opening moves were made. Admiral Yamamoto exercised over-all command of the Japanese forces from *Yamato*. Overall command of the American forces was by Admiral Nimitz at Pearl Harbour; Rear-Admiral Fletcher, as senior of the two operational flag officers, was O.T.C. (Officer in Tactical Command) of the two carrier groups.

The Battle of Midway presents a classic example of, on the Japanese side, sound strategy nullified by a faulty operational plan; and, on the American side, discriminating appreciation of Intelligence, and wise application thereof in operations, which offset inferiority in numbers and hitting power. Japanese objectives were the occupation of Midway and the western Aleutians, and a big fleet action. But in trying to achieve these, Admiral Yamamoto disposed his fleet in widely separated groups exposed to defeat in detail. The Japanese over-valued surprise; underestimated the extent and appreciation of American Intelligence; and also, through accepting reports that their enemy had lost two carriers at Coral Sea, depreciated American carrier strength, and placed undue reliance on their opponents conforming to Japanese plans. Thus they expected no opposition to the Midway invasion save from Midway itself; anticipated that the attack on the Aleutians would entice substantial American forces away from the main battle area into the northern mists; and looked forward to disposing overwhelmingly powerful forces—including the fixed aircraft carrier Midway—against an enemy lacking a battlefleet, and in every other way numerically inferior. The vital defect in this sort of plan was that it depended “on the enemy’s doing exactly what is expected. If he is smart enough to do something different—in this case to have fast carriers on the spot—the operation is thrown into confusion.”<sup>6</sup>

At 6 a.m. on 3rd June the Japanese struck at Dutch Harbour, Unalaska Island, the main American base in the Aleutians. Kakuta’s carriers reached their launching position 165 miles south of the island at 2.50 a.m. Fourteen bombers got through thick weather to their target, and for 20 minutes from 6 a.m. inflicted considerable damage to installations, and killed about 25 of the defenders—for the loss of two aircraft.

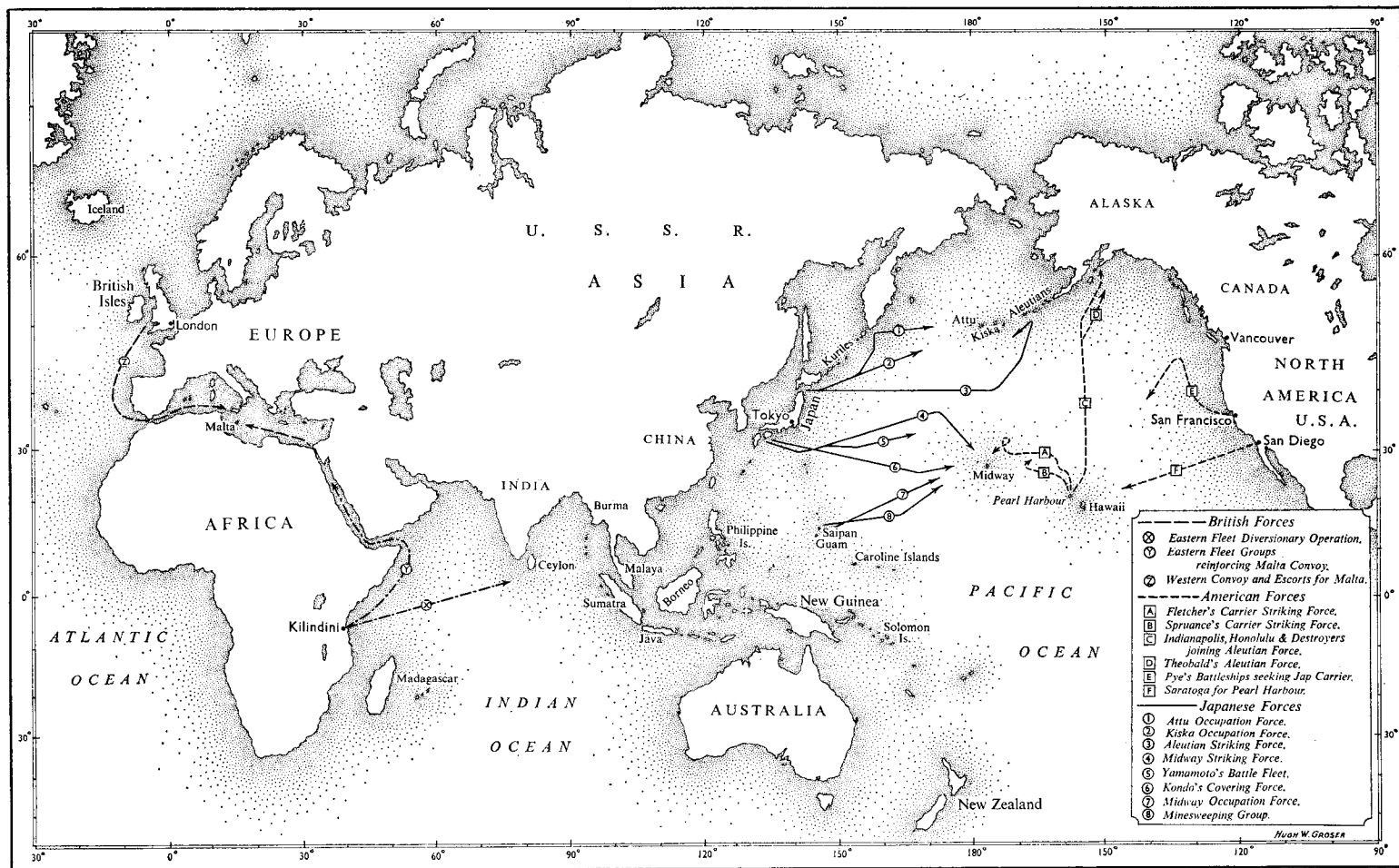
Some three hours later, and 1,900 miles to the south-west, a Midway-based Catalina amphibious aircraft sighted the transport group of the Midway Occupation Force, then about 700 miles W. by S. of its objective. At 4.24 that afternoon, when the group had lessened the distance to 570 miles, it was attacked, without effect, by bomber aircraft from Midway. A torpedo hit by a Catalina in a moonlight attack early on the morning of the 4th, temporarily slowed an oiler in the group; but no other damage was done to the approaching Japanese.

At 6 p.m. on 3rd June, the two American carrier groups were some 300 miles N.N.E. of Midway. Four hundred miles west of them Nagumo’s striking force was steaming south-east at 25 knots for its launching position, 240 miles north-west of Midway. The sighting of the Japanese transport group had been reported to Rear-Admiral Fletcher as that of the main body of the Japanese fleet. But he correctly relied on his original Intelligence that the enemy carrier force would approach Midway from the north-west to launch an air attack on the island at dawn, 4th June. He accordingly altered course to S.W. by S. at 7.50 p.m., so as to be about

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<sup>6</sup> Morison, Vol IV, p. 79.





The Battles of Midway and Malta, June 1942

200 miles north of Midway, in a position to attack the Japanese carriers while they were themselves striking at Midway.

At 4.30 a.m. on 4th June 1942 the respective forces were widely spread over the central and north Pacific. About 240 miles north-west of Midway, Nagumo was busy launching aircraft from all four carriers—108 aircraft in all, 36 bombers, 36 dive bombers, and 36 “Zero” (“Zeke”) fighters—for the first strike on the island. His force, in addition to the 4 carriers, included battleships *Haruna* and *Kirishima*, cruisers *Tone* and *Chikuma*, and 12 destroyers. Nagumo’s nearest support was Yamamoto’s powerful main battle fleet, 400 miles or so to his north-west; and, next to that, Kondo’s Midway Occupation Force covering group and close support group—2 battleships and 8 heavy cruisers—450 miles W.S.W. of him.

Some 210 miles E.N.E. of Nagumo were the two American striking forces. Their nearest support was the striking force of Marine aircraft on Midway Island; and, next to that, Rear-Admiral Fitch’s Task Force 11, the aircraft carrier *Saratoga*, light cruiser *San Diego*,<sup>7</sup> and three destroyers 1,750 miles to the eastward, making for Pearl Harbour from the west coast of America. Almost as far away to the north, Kakuta’s carriers of the Japanese *Second Mobile Force* were preparing for another strike against Dutch Harbour, while the Aleutian Occupation Force waited in a stand-by area south of the western islands of the chain and, away to the eastward, Rear-Admiral Theobald’s main force manoeuvred south of Kodiak Island off the Alaska Peninsula, in position to react against an expected Japanese attempt to occupy Dutch Harbour.

Thursday, 4th June, was a fine day in the central Pacific. In the early forenoon a gentle trade wind died to light airs; visibility, with embarrassing clarity in the region of the American carriers, varied to only 15 miles under the low cloud cover that helped the Japanese; the sea was smooth and, from the air, “looked like a dish of wrinkled blue Persian porcelain”;<sup>8</sup> the air temperature at 68 degrees to 70 degrees Fahrenheit, was pleasantly cool.

It was 5.34 a.m. when a Midway-based reconnaissance aircraft sighted the Japanese carriers and the aircraft speeding thence towards Midway, and broadcast a warning which was picked up by the American carriers. *Yorktown* had a search mission in the air, and Fletcher instructed Spruance, with his two carriers, to “proceed south-westerly and attack enemy carriers when definitely located”. That was just ten minutes before the Japanese struck Midway. The first bomb fell on the island about 6.30 a.m. Twenty minutes later the attack was over. It did heavy damage to installations and to the defending aircraft, and caused many casualties. But aerodrome runways remained usable. American estimates were that “at least one third of the attack group never returned”.<sup>9</sup> But the Japanese official combat

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<sup>7</sup> *San Diego*, US light cruiser (1942), 6,000 tons, twelve 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 32 kts.

<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol IV, p. 115.

<sup>9</sup> Morison, p. 105.

report gave their losses as five aircraft.<sup>1</sup> Seventeen American aircraft were shot down—and, at the time, the Japanese believed that they had accounted for 42.

At this time Nagumo had no intimation of the near-presence of American aircraft carriers. At 7 a.m. he received a message from the commander of the Midway attacking aircraft saying that a second strike was needed—and in confirmation of that there followed immediately an attack on the carriers by Midway-based aircraft. It was a failure. Ten torpedo aircraft failed to secure a hit, and seven were shot down by the Japanese. But the attack, confirming the need of a second strike on Midway, and the lack of any report of American carriers in the vicinity, caused Nagumo to take a fateful decision. He had, in his four carriers, 93 aircraft standing by for instant launching against surface forces. He ordered them struck below to clear his flight decks for the recovery of the returning aircraft of the first Midway striking force—and for the torpedo aircrafts' armament to be changed to bombs for a second attack on the atoll.

The first news of enemy surface forces reached Nagumo at 7.28 a.m., when a reconnaissance aircraft from the cruiser *Tone* reported ten ships, a report elaborated at 8.9 a.m. to "five cruisers and five destroyers", and given point at 8.20 a.m. with the amendment "the enemy is accompanied by what appears to be a carrier". By then Spruance had launched 116 aircraft—29 torpedo bombers, 67 dive bombers, and 20 fighters—from *Hornet* and *Enterprise*, which were steaming S.W. by W. at 25 knots in their wake towards the Japanese forces.

Meanwhile Nagumo's force, which had successfully withstood more attacks by Midway-based aircraft and inflicted heavy losses while suffering no damage, had recovered its returning Midway attack aircraft, and at 9.17 Nagumo turned his ships towards the Americans—to E.N.E.—his carriers scenes of lively activity as aircraft were refuelled and rearmed. They were in this condition when, soon after 9.30, the first American carrier aircraft delivered their attack. It was by 15 torpedo bombers from *Hornet*. With no fighter cover, they were all shot down by Japanese fighters or ships' anti-aircraft fire, without any torpedoes reaching their targets. A few minutes later a second attack was delivered by 14 torpedo bombers from *Enterprise*. They never made a hit, and ten were shot down. At 10 a.m. twelve torpedo bombers from *Yorktown* attacked. Again no hits were scored, and ten of the aircraft were shot down.

Out of 41 torpedo aircraft from the three carriers, only six returned, and not a single torpedo reached the enemy ships. Yet

it was the stark courage and relentless drive of these young pilots of the obsolete torpedo planes that made possible the victory that followed. The radical manoeuvring that they imposed on the Japanese carriers prevented them from launching more planes. And the TBDs, by acting as magnets for the enemy's combat air patrol and pulling "Zekes" down to near water level, enabled the dive-bombing squadrons

<sup>1</sup> M. Okumiya and J. Horikoshi, with M. Caidin, *Zero! The Story of the Japanese Navy Air Force 1937-1945* (English edn. 1957), p. 123.

that followed a few minutes later to attack virtually unopposed by fighter planes, and to drop bombs on full deckloads in the process of being refuelled.<sup>2</sup>

Slow-ripening fruits of the torpedo bombers' attacks were now to be gathered. At 10.26 a.m., only two minutes after *Akagi* had evaded the last of the torpedo bombers, she was attacked by dive bombers from *Enterprise* and received three direct and fatal hits. The ship was quickly ablaze, and twenty minutes after the first hit Nagumo left her, and transferred his flag to light cruiser *Nagara*. *Akagi* was abandoned in the early evening, and the still-floating wreck was torpedoed and sunk by a Japanese destroyer before sunrise on 5th June. As *Akagi*'s people abandoned ship in the evening of the 4th, their ship's near-sister *Kaga* blew up with a tremendous explosion at 7.25 p.m. She, too, had been a blazing wreck for some hours, having received four direct hits from the *Enterprise* dive bombers within two or three minutes of the attack on *Akagi*. *Kaga*'s death plunge was anticipated by five minutes by that of a third member of Nagumo's carrier force—*Soryu*. At the same time that *Akagi* received her death blows, *Soryu*, at 10.26 a.m., received three direct hits, burst into flames, and was abandoned. Three and a half hours later, when a damage control party had returned on board, got her fires under control and the ship moving at about two knots, she was torpedoed by the U.S. submarine *Nautilus*.<sup>3</sup> She took her final plunge about 7.20 p.m.

The fourth of Nagumo's carriers, *Hiryu*, had a few hours to live—and, during that time her aircraft, in two attacks, dive-bombing and torpedo, reduced *Yorktown* to a wreck. She remained afloat for some hours, but sank at 6 a.m. on 7th June, after having been torpedoed by the Japanese submarine *I 168*<sup>4</sup> (which at the same time sank the destroyer *Hammann*) at 1.30 p.m. on the 6th. Meanwhile *Hiryu* had gone the way of her three companions. She was attacked by *Enterprise* dive bombers at 5 p.m. on the 4th, received four direct hits, and finally sank (after she had been torpedoed by Japanese destroyers) at 9 a.m. on 5th June.

The Japanese suffered one more loss as an aftermath of the battle, the cruiser *Mikuma*. With the loss of his carrier striking force, Admiral Yamamoto—after considering but rejecting the idea of a bombardment of Midway by the heavy cruisers of Rear-Admiral Kurita's close support group prior to a landing—at 2.55 a.m. on the 5th ordered a general retirement of his forces to the north-west. Soon after it altered course in conforming, Kurita's force made an emergency turn at 3.42 a.m. to avoid attack by the U.S. submarine *Tambor*,<sup>5</sup> and *Mogami* and *Mikuma* collided and crippled each other, lagging far behind in the withdrawal as a result. As lone, lame ducks, they suffered air attacks, first by Midway-based aircraft in the early forenoon of the 5th, and then, during the morning of the 6th,

<sup>2</sup> Morison, p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> *Nautilus*, US submarine (1930), 2,730 tons, two 6-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 17 kts.

<sup>4</sup> *I 168*, Japanese submarine (1933), 1,400 tons, one 4-in gun, 23 kts. Sunk off New Hebrides, 3 Sep 1943.

<sup>5</sup> *Tambor*, US submarine (1940), 1,475 tons, one 3-in gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 20 kts.

by aircraft from *Enterprise* and *Hornet*. *Mogami*, reduced to a battered hulk, managed to make Truk. *Mikuma* sank during the night of the 6th.

In the far north, the Japanese carried out a second air raid on Dutch Harbour on 4th June, and occupied Kiska and Attu Islands in the western Aleutians, the only part of their over-all plan which was realised. Yet it was in the north that they suffered a loss which was to cost them dear in the months ahead. In the first air attack on Dutch Harbour on 3rd June, a Japanese "Zero" fighter crash-landed on a small island. The pilot was killed, but the aircraft was only slightly damaged. Recovered by the Americans, and removed to the United States, it was repaired, subjected to exhaustive flight tests, and became the model from which was produced the U.S. Navy's Grumman F6F Hellcat. "With a 2,000-horsepower engine, the new Hellcat had a higher maximum speed than the [Zero], could out-climb and outdive and outgun it, and the desired benefits of high structural strength, armour plating, and self-sealing fuel tanks. . . . Later, we were to feel strongly that the unnoticed capture of the aircraft, assisting the enemy so greatly in producing a fighter intended specifically to overcome the [Zero's] advantages, did much to hasten our final defeat."<sup>6</sup>

The results of Midway forced two immediate changes in Japanese policy. One was the abandonment of offensive operations—the cancellation of plans for the conquest of Fiji, New Caledonia, and Samoa—and the return to a more westerly defence line "to be held at virtually all costs before an enemy who was now expected to commence his own assault operations". The other was the reorganisation of the Combined Fleet, concentrating on maximum development of naval land-based air forces, and the rebuilding of the surface fleet around a core of aircraft carriers. This last was a drastic change. Until Midway, the Japanese Navy had still regarded the heavy, fast battleship as the priority naval weapon. It had *Yamato* and *Musashi*, largest and most powerful battleships ever built, laid down in 1937; and two additional ships of the class were under construction, together with two new-type battleships. Within the month embraced by the Coral Sea and Midway actions—in neither of which battleships took an active part—Japan lost five aircraft carriers. She had eight remaining.<sup>7</sup> After Midway, to build up carrier strength on this remaining foundation, work was started on the conversion of the third *Yamato*-class ship—*Shinano*—to an aircraft carrier; and the building of the fourth battleship of the class, then in its initial stages, was abandoned, together with that of all other battleship construction. Fifteen new *Hiryu*-class carriers (20,000 tons) and five *Taiho*-class (34,000 tons) were ordered. But in the event only four of the *Hiryu*'s were launched, and only one of the *Taiho*'s was completed.

A month after Midway, on 14th July, the Japanese Navy received its reorganisation orders. The main carrier strength was in the two divisions

<sup>6</sup> Okumiya and Horikoshi, *Zero!*, pp. 127-8.

<sup>7</sup> Lost: *Shoho*; *Akagi*; *Kaga*; *Soryu*; *Hiryu*. Remaining: *Shokaku* (29,800 tons); *Zuikaku* (29,800 tons); *Junyo* (27,500 tons); *Taiyo* (20,000 tons); *Unyo* (20,000 tons); *Zuiho* (13,950 tons); *Ryujō* (11,700 tons); *Hosho* (9,500 tons).

of the *Third Fleet*; 1st Carrier Division, *Shokaku*, *Zuikaku*, *Zuiho*; 2nd Carrier Division, *Junyo*, *Hiyo*,<sup>8</sup> *Ryujo*. These ships carried a total of 310 aircraft (torpedo bombers, dive bombers, fighters) nearly half the carrier-based aircraft then available. About half of the total first-line naval aircraft available for combat were land-based. The weakness of the Japanese position at this time, with the stocktaking after Midway, was made painfully apparent by the fact that, after six months of almost unbroken successes, first-line naval aircraft totalled 1,498—an increase of only 117 over the number at the outbreak of war. The production outlook was poor, and the overall air situation was even more depressing in that, with all its shortcomings, that of the navy was infinitely better than that of the army.

The new Japanese defence line in its outermost reaches extended west of the Aleutian Islands in the north, to the Marshall Islands in the east; from Rabaul to the north-east coast of New Guinea and the Solomon Islands in the south; to the Dutch East Indies, Malaya, and Burma in the west. To strengthen and safeguard the south-eastern “anchor” of this line, the Japanese desired control of the Coral Sea, exercised mainly through air power at Port Moresby and the southern Solomons. Their first effort to secure these air bases received a partial setback at the Coral Sea Battle, then they were forced to postpone their intended capture of Port Moresby, but succeeded in securing a foothold in the southern Solomons at Tulagi. Now they were about to resume their attempts to secure Port Moresby, this time by an attack overland from the north coast of New Guinea. As a preliminary to this, Rear-Admiral Sadayoshi Yamada, commanding the *25th Air Flotilla* with headquarters at Rabaul, maintained heavy and frequent air attack against Port Moresby.

Air attacks against Darwin were also resumed by aircraft of the *23rd Air Flotilla*, based on Timor. The northern Australian port had its sixteenth air raid—the first since 27th April—on 13th June, when Nos. 1 and 2 stores in the Naval Victualling Yard received direct hits and a quantity of stores was destroyed. Darwin was visited on each of the next three nights, by forces of up to 27 bombers with strong fighter escort. Port Moresby had its 61st raid, by 18 bombers and nine fighters, on 17th June. The Australian ship *Macdhui* (4,561 tons) was hit, the midships section gutted, and three crew members and one member of a military working party were killed, and a number wounded. In another raid next day, also by 18 bombers, *Macdhui* again suffered direct hits, burned fiercely, and became a total loss. There were other portents: Japanese interest in Buna—shown by the prolonged aerial reconnaissance of 3rd June—and activities in the southern Solomons. On 20th June fires were seen to be burning over the whole of the grass plains on Guadalcanal's northern hinterland, suggesting the preparation of airfields. Destroyers lay off Lunga. And, on the north coast at Kikum and Tenaru, tents were reported. These wrote the preface to a new chapter in the war in the western Pacific.

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<sup>8</sup> *Hiyo* (28,000 tons) had been commissioned only in July.

## V

As stated above, the initial Japanese move towards the Battle of Midway was simultaneous with the departure from the western Indian Ocean of Group I Mediterranean Reinforcements from the Eastern Fleet. The next day there started military movements on land which were to affect and be affected by the operation in which these ships were to take part. On the evening of 26th May General Rommel launched an attack upon the British in Cyrenaica, with the capture of Tobruk as his immediate objective, leading on towards the conquest of Egypt. The almost complete neutralisation of Malta by heavy and continuous air attack, and the Mediterranean Fleet's lack of a battle fleet and aircraft carriers, had enabled Rommel to build up his strength for this attempt. The Italian naval historian records that Axis ships supplying North Africa sailed in greater safety during April and the first half of May than at any other time during the war, and convoys had been routed within 50 miles of Malta, escorted by only one or two torpedo aircraft.<sup>9</sup> In addition to this, the strategic change in the situation as regards sea control meant that Rommel now had the invaluable help of sea communications on his flank. "German U-boats, E-boats, R-boats, and landing craft operated on the sea flank of the army and by his transport and security measures the German naval commander safeguarded supplies by coastal traffic eastward from Benghazi with his escort forces."<sup>10</sup>

Vice-Admiral Weichold, German Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, recorded that in May 7,500 tons of German army supplies were unloaded in the harbour of Derna, close behind the front. This covered about 60 per cent of the normal requirements of the *Africa Corps*. During June Derna's unloading capacity rose to almost 11,000 tons, while also in the latter half of that month Tobruk became an Axis unloading port, when 4,000 tons of supplies were discharged there. "This meant that in the vital month of June, decisive for the Cyrenaican campaign, almost 15,000 tons of supplies had been transported to the Panzer army directly to the rear of their own front. These figures show the far-reaching support of the land operations by the coastal supplies of the German naval command, which for the first and only time freed the Panzer army from the bleak prospect of constant shortages."<sup>1</sup>

By contrast, the British were hard put to it to succour Malta. As mentioned earlier, after the heavy losses of the "Battle of Sirte" convoy in March, consideration was given to sending *Warspite* and the carriers from the Eastern Fleet through the Canal to fight a convoy through from Alexandria to Malta; but some relief had then come to the island with the fighters flown in from U.S.S. *Wasp* and H.M.S. *Eagle*, and events in the Indian Ocean in April (the Japanese descent into the Bay of Bengal) and May (the Diego Suarez operation) demanded the reinforcement rather

<sup>9</sup> M. A. Bragadin, *Che ha fatto la Marina?* (1956).

<sup>10</sup> Weichold, post-war Essay.

<sup>1</sup> Post-war Essay.

than the weakening of the Eastern Fleet. Now that the need arose to strengthen the Mediterranean Fleet with capital ships and aircraft carriers in order to fight vital supplies through to Malta, those of the Eastern Fleet could not be transferred because they were employed on the diversionary movement to help the Americans in the Battle of Midway.

The plan for the June attempt to succour Malta was similar to those of the successful 1941 convoys—to run convoys through the Mediterranean to Malta simultaneously from Gibraltar and Alexandria. The Admiralty had to draw upon several stations to collect the escorts for the western convoy, including the battleship *Malaya* and the two old, slow, and small carriers *Eagle* and *Argus*, while the eastern convoy had nothing heavier than 6-inch gun cruisers with which to counter probable opposition by an Italian battle fleet. To redress the balance slightly, the British planned to use submarines and aircraft. The nine boats of the 1st and 10th Submarine Flotillas would be disposed to the north of the convoy, moving westward with it, to cover the enemy's most probable movements. Some 40 aircraft, from Malta and from Egypt, would also attack the enemy forces. The weakness in this plan was the lack of adequate reconnaissance, but in the event some results were achieved, and no doubt had some influence on the Italian actions. It was also planned to give the escorting and covering forces increased striking power with motor torpedo boats, to be towed until contact was made with the surface enemy; but the weather defeated this.

Rommel's attack on 26th May was only partially successful. He had hoped to capture Tobruk on the second day, but after three or four days of heavy fighting he had to seek refuge in a bridgehead established in the British minefields. There he rested and replenished. An attempt to break in on him on 4th June was a failure, with heavy British losses in what General Auchinleck later described as "the turning point of the whole battle". The French defenders had to be withdrawn from Bir Hacheim, enabling Rommel to turn the British flank and attack towards Tobruk from the south. This he did on 12th June, the day on which the respective convoy movements got under way in the Mediterranean.

In the west, six merchant ships with supplies for Malta totalling some 43,000 tons, were escorted by the battleship *Malaya*; carriers *Eagle* and *Argus*; 3 cruisers; one anti-aircraft cruiser; and 17 destroyers. Command of the western operation was vested in Vice-Admiral Curteis,<sup>2</sup> flying his flag in the cruiser *Kenya*.<sup>3</sup> By the morning of the 12th they were well within the Mediterranean, steering east. That morning the eleven merchant ships of the eastern convoy were proceeding from their loading ports (Haifa and Port Said) to rendezvous with the escorting and covering forces, totalling seven 6-inch gun cruisers, one anti-aircraft cruiser, and 24 destroyers. This force included the ships from the Eastern Fleet, among

<sup>2</sup> Admiral Sir Alban Curteis, KCB; RN. (Served 1914-18 War.) Rear-Adm Cdg 2nd Cruiser Sqn 1940-41; Vice-Adm Cdg 2nd Battle Sqn and Second-in-Comd Home Fleet 1941-42; Senior British Naval Officer Western Atlantic 1942-44. B. 13 Jan 1887. Died 27 Nov 1961.

<sup>3</sup> HMS *Kenya*, cruiser (1940), 8,000 tons, twelve 6-in. guns, 33 kts.



them the four ships of the 7th Flotilla, H.M.A. Ships *Napier* (Captain (D), Captain Arliss, R.N.), *Nestor*, *Nizam* and *Norman*. The old target ship *Centurion*<sup>4</sup> masqueraded, virtually unarmed, as a battleship. The eastern operation was under the over-all command of the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, Admiral Sir Henry Harwood,<sup>5</sup> in Alexandria. The operational command was with Rear-Admiral Vian, flying his flag as CS15, in *Cleopatra*.

In the east, both on sea and on land, events ran against the British on the 12th and 13th June. At this early stage two merchant ships had to be dropped out of the convoy because they could not maintain maximum speed—*City of Calcutta* (8,063 tons), damaged in an air attack, and *Elizabeth Bakke* (5,450 tons), with a foul bottom. On the 13th the motor torpedo boats in tow had to be slipped and sent back to Alexandria, as they were suffering weather damage. On the 14th the merchant ships in the convoy were reduced to eight when *Aagtekerk* (6,811 tons) had to be detached to Tobruk because she could not maintain speed. She was sunk in an air attack before she reached port.

On the 14th, both western and eastern convoys came under fire from the air, and suffered accordingly. In the morning of that day the western group came within range of enemy air attack from Sardinia, whence heavy strikes which the fighters from *Eagle* and *Argus* were too few adequately to counter were delivered by high-level and torpedo bombers from 10.30 a.m. The cruiser *Liverpool* was hit in the engine-room and was fortunate to reach Gibraltar, mostly in tow, and the merchant ship *Tanimbar* (8,169 tons) was sunk. That evening the convoy reached "The Narrows"—between Sicily and North Africa—and the heavy ships hauled round to the westward to await the return from Malta of light escort forces—five Fleet destroyers and four escort "Hunts"—under the command of Captain C. C. Hardy, R.N., in the anti-aircraft cruiser *Cairo*,<sup>6</sup> which were to fight the convoy through the rest of the way to their destination. Air attacks were successfully survived. That evening enemy surface forces also prepared to take a hand when two Italian 6-inch gun cruisers and five destroyers sailed from Palermo.

In the east, Vian's convoy, by the evening of the 14th, reached the limit of distance to which fighter cover from Cyrenaica could give protection. It came under heavy air attack, and the merchant ship *Bhutan* (6,104 tons) was sunk. The threat of surface attack on this convoy now loomed also. At dusk German E-boats (motor torpedo boats) from Derna were sighted, and kept contact with the convoy, though they were held off; and at 6.45 p.m. British reconnaissance aircraft reported Italian heavy forces leaving the Gulf of Taranto. These comprised two battleships,

<sup>4</sup> HMS *Centurion* (1911), 25,500 tons, 16 kts.

<sup>5</sup> At the end of March 1942 Admiral Cunningham relinquished command of the Mediterranean Station to head the Admiralty delegation in Washington. He was succeeded pro tem by Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell until Admiral Harwood assumed command and hoisted his flag in *Queen Elizabeth* on 20th May.

<sup>6</sup> HMS *Cairo*, anti-aircraft cruiser (1919; rearmed for AA duties 1939), eight 4-in AA, one multiple pompom, 26 kts.

*Vittorio Veneto* and *Littorio*, two heavy and two light cruisers, and about 12 destroyers. Since it was evident that this force could intercept early on the 15th, Vian signalled Harwood asking if he was to continue westward. He was told to reverse course at 2 a.m. on the 15th. Shortly after this turn was made, the cruiser *Newcastle* was torpedoed by an E-boat, but was able to continue. Just before dawn on the 15th the destroyer *Hasty* was also torpedoed by an E-boat, and was sunk by *Hotspur* after that ship had removed her crew.

It was on the 14th that an Australian, R. G. Casey, who on 18th March 1942 was appointed United Kingdom Minister of State in Cairo, said in a telegram to Mr Churchill regarding the Western Desert battle: "The outcome of the two convoys to Malta rests on today and tomorrow. The Western Desert will undoubtedly help the west-bound convoy from the air point of view. The greater danger to the west-bound convoy tomorrow will be from surface vessels of the Italian Fleet."<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the estimate of help that the Western Desert would give to Vian's convoy was over-optimistic. Affairs were developing badly for the British on land. Rommel was forcing his way northwards and eastwards towards Tobruk and the Egyptian frontier, depriving the Royal Air Force of advanced airfields from which fighter protection could be given to the convoy. By the 14th Rommel had won a tank battle which left him in possession of the ridges south of Tobruk, threatening to cut off the 1st South African and 50th Divisions to the west of Tobruk—they were saved only by immediate withdrawal—and menacing Acroma and El Adem, due west and south respectively of the fortress. In this advantageous position he rested momentarily in preparation for his next thrust. Thus, as it turned out, air attack remained a greater menace to the success of the operation than did the Italian surface forces. By 5.25 a.m. the now east-bound convoy was approaching an area where the risks of enemy air attack appeared to Admiral Harwood to outweigh those of interception by enemy surface forces, and he instructed Vian to turn north-westward, which he did at 6.55 a.m., when the Italians were about 240 miles N.W. by W of him, steering S.S.W.

Shortly before this the Italians were attacked by torpedo-bomber aircraft from Malta, and by submarines. The cruiser *Trento*<sup>8</sup> was damaged in the air attack, and was sunk later in the morning by the submarine *Umbra*.<sup>9</sup> At 8 a.m. the Italians altered to south-east. Between 9 and 10 o'clock they were attacked by bombers and torpedo-bombers from Egypt, but the only hit was a bomb on *Littorio*'s forward turret which did no major damage. The Italians held on, and at 9.40, when they were some 150 miles W.N.W. of the convoy and closing fast, Harwood instructed Vian to turn east again.

<sup>7</sup> Churchill, Vol IV, p. 329.

<sup>8</sup> *Trento*, Italian cruiser (1929), 10,000 tons, eight 8-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. Sunk 15 Jun 1942.

<sup>9</sup> HMS *Umbra*, submarine (1941), 540 tons, one 3-in gun, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 11½ kts.

Meanwhile the western convoy had also been menaced by surface forces, with which its escorts were in action. At 6.50 a.m., when the convoy was about 30 miles south of Pantellaria, the Italians were sighted to the north. *Cairo* and the "Hunts" laid a smoke screen while the five Fleet destroyers attacked. Two, *Bedouin*<sup>1</sup> and *Partridge*,<sup>2</sup> were hit and disabled. When the convoy was screened by smoke, *Cairo* and the four "Hunts" joined in the surface action and drove the enemy off. But simultaneously an enemy dive-bombing attack was delivered on the convoy. One ship, *Chant* (5,601 tons) was sunk, and the tanker *Kentucky* (5,446 tons) hit but taken in tow; and in another air attack about 11.20 a.m. the merchant ship *Burdwan* (6,069 tons) was hit and disabled. Captain Hardy decided to sacrifice her and *Kentucky* as the best chance of saving the rest of the convoy, and their crews were removed and the two ships were eventually sunk by Italian torpedo aircraft.

There followed a morning of successive but fruitless attempts by the Italian squadron to get at the convoy; and of air attacks, in one of which *Bedouin*, then in tow by *Partridge*, was sunk. *Partridge*, in a crippled state, managed to make Gibraltar two days later. The remaining two merchant ships, *Orari* (10,350 tons) and *Troilus* (7,422 tons), and their escorts, survived more air attacks during the afternoon, but suffered additional losses in their final approach to Malta, when *Orari* and four of the escort vessels struck mines. All of the damaged ships made harbour safely except the Polish destroyer *Kujawiak*, which sank.

Some time before the survivors of the western convoy reached Malta, the decision was made to abandon the attempt to reach the island from the east. Just before noon optimistic reports from the attacking British aircraft claiming hits on both Italian battleships moved Admiral Harwood to instruct Vian to turn west again, but this was later amended to an instruction to use his discretion whether to hold on or to retire. The convoy was under almost continuous heavy air attacks. In the early afternoon the cruiser *Birmingham* was damaged, and the destroyer *Airedale*<sup>3</sup> so severely crippled that she had to be sunk. At 4.15 the Italian surface forces were reported to be retiring to Taranto, but by then the scale of air attack and the resultant heavy drain on ammunition left the escort ships with insufficient remaining to make a westward turn and fighting passage to Malta practicable, and at 8.53 p.m. Harwood instructed Vian to return to Alexandria with the whole force.

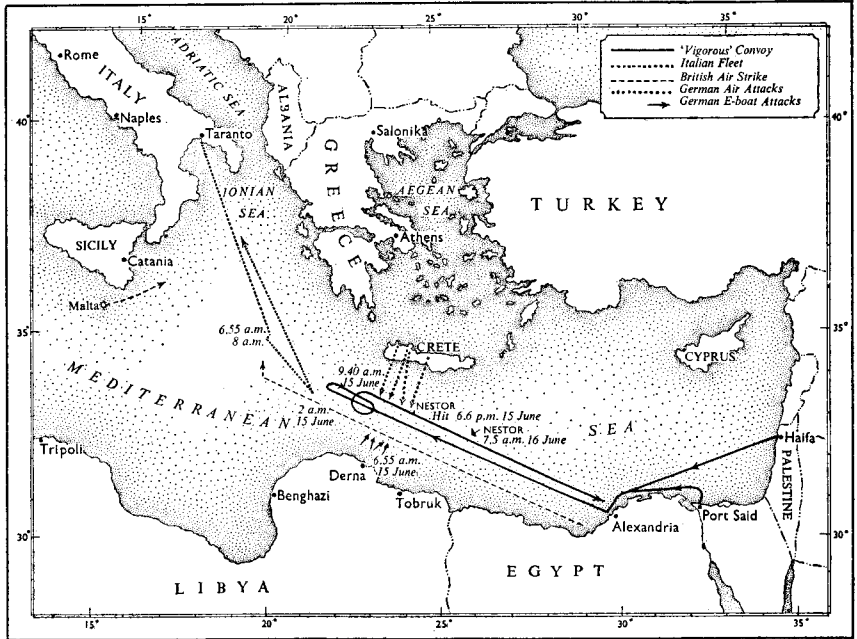
Some time before this the force suffered another casualty when H.M.A.S. *Nestor* (Commander A. S. Rosenthal, R.A.N.) was straddled by two heavy bombs in a high-level attack, and completely crippled. The convoy was about 100 miles due north of Tobruk, steering E.S.E., with *Nestor*

<sup>1</sup> HMS *Bedouin*, destroyer (1939), 1,870 tons, eight 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torpedo tubes, 36½ kts. Sunk in Mediterranean, 15 Jun 1942.

<sup>2</sup> HMS *Partridge*, destroyer (1941), 1,540 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts. Sunk in Mediterranean, 18 Dec 1942.

<sup>3</sup> HMS *Airedale*, destroyer (1940), 904 tons, four 4-in AA guns, 27½ kts. Sunk in Mediterranean, 15 Jun 1942.

one of the close anti-submarine screen when, at 6.6 p.m., one bomb fell some 50 feet from the ship's starboard side and another within two or three feet of the port side amidships, causing her to flex violently in the bridge, mast, and funnel area, damaging fittings and throwing everyone in the vicinity to the deck. *Napier* (D.7) was next ship but one, and Captain Arliss, realising by the way *Nestor's* upper deck was hogged and from the amount of steam coming from air intakes, that she was badly



"Vigorous" convoy and loss of *Nestor*, June 1942

damaged and probably without any power, signalled to *Javelin*<sup>4</sup> (Lieut-Commander J. M. Alliston, R.N., who later commanded H.M.A.S. *Warramunga*<sup>5</sup>), to take her in tow, but to remove the crew and sink her if conditions were too difficult. Vian made a similar signal to *Javelin*.

The main damage was to the hull, which was extensively distorted and holed on the port side, causing the immediate flooding of No. 1 Boiler Room (all of whose occupants were killed<sup>6</sup>) and total loss of steam and all electric power. No. 2 Boiler Room subsequently flooded also, precluding the possibility of raising steam.

<sup>4</sup> HMS *Javelin*, destroyer (1939), 1,690 tons, six 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 36 kts.

<sup>5</sup> HMAS *Warramunga*, destroyer (1942), 1,870 tons, six 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>6</sup> Stoker PO J. B. Bulmer, 19982, RAN; Ldg Stoker C. B. Hill, 21751, RAN; Ldg Stoker M. Burns, C/KX 94897, RN; Stoker L. J. Blight, F.3546, RAN.

The bodies of the four ratings in No. 1 Boiler Room were recovered by the ship's medical officer, Lieutenant Watson,<sup>7</sup> who "displayed outstanding bravery in immediately entering No. 1 Boiler Room in order to rescue the crew who he knew must either be killed or seriously injured. Of the conditions in the boiler room he had no idea; when he entered it he found it in darkness and flooded. In spite of this he dived repeatedly until all the men were recovered. Unfortunately they had all been killed."<sup>8</sup>

As a result of the damage and water intake, *Nestor* settled by the head, and listed to port so that "the scuttles in the lower after messdeck were lapping the water as the ship rolled".<sup>9</sup> Below decks, bulkheads were shored and leaks plugged, and on deck torpedoes, paravanes, and depth charges were jettisoned, and stores were moved to the upper deck starboard side to reduce the list. By 2 a.m. on the 16th the list was stabilised at about five degrees to port, and all leaks were under control, and by 4 a.m. the ship, trimming by the bow by about two or three feet, "was completely seaworthy regarding damage control for it to have been towed for an indefinite period".<sup>1</sup>

Potentially most dangerous, however, was a fire which was discovered half an hour or so after the bombing, when it was noticed that, in spite of the flooded boiler rooms, the funnel was starting to smoke and its base was rapidly getting hot. The fire was found to be at the back of No. 1 Boiler Room, of oil from fractured fuel tanks floating on the water. It was attacked by various means and eventually subdued—about midnight—through the adoption of a suggestion of Rosenthal's to use hammocks to blanket the base of the funnel. Using bearing-off spars, some hundred or so hammocks, soaked in sea water, were poked into the base of the funnel uptake through a small door in the funnel's starboard side. A chain bucket party, and later a portable hand pump, kept them wetted. Once a wall of hammocks had been built across the funnel, open hammocks and blankets were laid on top to make an effective seal. In about half an hour the funnel was cool enough for the siren ladders to be used and the funnel cover to be secured—and the fire was effectively smothered.

Meanwhile *Javelin* had taken *Nestor* in tow. She went alongside the helpless destroyer once that ship had dropped clear of the convoy. One of *Nestor*'s ratings later recorded the incident: "A British destroyer, *Javelin*, came alongside to pass a tow line while the German bombers continued their assault. Commander Rosenthal called out to the British ship's commanding officer that the risk to *Javelin* was too great, and advised him to get clear of the area. 'Don't be so bloody stupid,' came the reply, and *Javelin* took *Nestor* in tow." This first tow was with *Nestor*'s

<sup>7</sup> Surg Lt-Cdr S. A. C. Watson, DSC, VRD; RANR. HMAS's *Nestor*, *Manoora* and *Arunta*. Medical practitioner; of Sydney; b. Ulster, Ireland, 27 Jul 1915.

<sup>8</sup> Captain Rosenthal's report of 17 June 1942 to Captain (D) 7.

<sup>9</sup> Rosenthal's report.

<sup>1</sup> Report of Engineer Officer, Lt-Cdr (E) R. G. Parker, RAN, to Captain Rosenthal, 17 June 1942. Capt R. G. Parker, OBE; RAN. HMAS's *Nestor* 1941-42, *Hobart* 1942-43; Engr Offr Garden Island Dockyard 1943-50. Of Neutral Bay, NSW; b. Mosman, NSW, 24 Feb 1906.

4½-inch wire with one shackle of cable outboard, and *Javelin* went ahead at 6.50 p.m. and gradually worked up to 14½ knots. The two ships, and three "Hunts" sent to screen them, were under air attack for some time around 7 p.m., but survived both high-level and torpedo-bomber strikes and shot down two of the attackers. But *Nestor*, due to her trim by the bow, yawed excessively, and at 10.59 p.m. the tow parted at *Javelin*'s end. Being without power, *Nestor* was unable to handle the weight of cable and wire suspended from her bull ring, and had to slip it. A second tow was prepared, using *Javelin*'s 4½-inch wire shackled to two-and-a-half shackles of cable at *Nestor*'s end, and towing was resumed at 12.36 a.m. on the 16th. But four hours later the tow again parted through *Nestor*'s excessive yawing. The only towing gear now remaining was the 3½-inch towing wires of the "Hunts", and the hurricane hawsers and manillas carried by *Nestor* and *Javelin*. The ships had covered only 80 miles in 10 hours under ideal weather conditions—though towing conditions were far from ideal owing to *Nestor*'s trim by the head—and were still 230 miles from Alexandria, and the remaining towing gear was such that had towing been resumed it would not have been possible to have proceeded faster than dead slow, making both ships an easy target for submarines and aircraft. Dawn was just breaking, and in the growing light three German E-boats were sighted, driving home the knowledge that the gauntlet of enemy attacks extended over the whole distance to be covered, and would be relentless and unrelenting. It was felt that continued attempts to tow invited the loss of *Javelin* in addition to that of *Nestor*, and at 7.5 a.m. on the 16th, in position 115 miles north-east of Tobruk, *Nestor*'s company were removed and the ship sunk by *Javelin*.

Meanwhile the main force, moving on ahead of *Javelin*, *Nestor*, and the three "Hunts", paid another forfeit. At 1.26 a.m. on the 16th the cruiser *Hermione*, torpedoed by the German submarine *U 205*, heeled over and sank very quickly. It was the final payment in this attempt to nourish Malta. In the evening of the 16th the remaining merchant ships and escorts of the eastern convoy reached Alexandria.

In a balance sheet of material debits and credits the advantage lay with the enemy. In the two convoys six merchant ships, one cruiser, and five destroyers were lost. The Italians lost one cruiser. But two merchant ships of the western convoy got through to Malta with their supplies, a fact of which the German Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, later wrote:

The attack of the force from Alexandria was repulsed with losses to the enemy; the repulse of the enemy operation from the west was not so successful. British units succeeded in fighting their way through the Straits of Sicily and reaching Malta. In spite of the losses sustained this operation must be counted as a British operational success having particular regard to the Malta operation [the invasion] projected by the Axis. Every ton less of war material in the island could be of decisive significance for the success of the German operation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Weichold, post-war Essay.

In the event the "operation projected by the Axis" never materialised. On the day Vian's force returned to Alexandria, Rommel renewed his attacks in the Desert, and rapidly took Acroma, El Adem, and Belhamed, some sixteen miles south-east of Tobruk, which was itself isolated and surrounded by 19th June. At dawn next day he opened his assault on the south-eastern perimeter of the fortress. By 6 p.m. his advance forces were in the outskirts of the town. Twelve hours later Major-General H. B. Klopper, commanding the 2nd South African Division and the fortress, sent out an offer to capitulate, and the Germans accepted his surrender at his headquarters at 7.45 a.m. on 21st June. Thus, after 514 days in British possession since 22nd January 1941—233 days of which it was beleaguered, and the especial interest of Australia both in its resolute defenders and its gauntlet-running suppliers of the 10th Destroyer Flotilla and their companions—Tobruk passed temporarily into Axis hands. Yet the sacrifices that had been made in its holding were not thrown away, and the Australian losses within its perimeter and in its adjacent sea were not in vain. For it was in this present capture of Tobruk that lay the seeds of Rommel's forthcoming defeat, and the expulsion of the Axis from North Africa.

On 21st June Admiral Harwood sent a signal to the Admiralty:

Tobruk has fallen, and situation deteriorated so much that there is a possibility of heavy air attack on Alexandria in near future, and in view of approaching full moon period I am sending all Eastern Fleet units south of the Canal to await events. I hope to get H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth* out of dock towards end of this week.

The battleship undocked and sailed for Port Sudan on 27th June. Some other ships were moved south of the Canal (the Eastern Fleet units returned to the Indian Ocean) and the rest of the Mediterranean Fleet was divided between the rearward bases of Haifa, Port Said, and Beirut. Preparations were made to destroy stores and facilities at Alexandria, and to block the harbour.

Throughout the rest of the month the threat to Alexandria grew. The British left Salum on 24th June, and that day the Axis forces crossed the frontier into Egypt. Next day they were only 40 miles from Mersa Matruh, to where the British had retired. On the evening of the 26th the enemy broke through the Matruh defences and nearly trapped the defending divisions of the X Corps, and the New Zealand Division to the south. The New Zealanders fought their way out in the night of the 27th-28th and, as did the others, successfully moved back to El Alamein, where the main defensive position was being prepared. There, only 60 miles west of Alexandria, the Eighth Army was established by the last day of the month.

Meanwhile the enemy command had reached a fateful decision. As stated earlier, their plans had called for the reconquest of Cyrenaica, including the capture of Tobruk, as the prerequisite to the invasion of Malta. This was reiterated as late as 21st June by Mussolini. But the ease with which Tobruk was captured prompted Rommel to envisage the

immediate destruction of the Eighth Army and his penetration "into the heart of Egypt" without worrying about Malta. He sought, and received, the approval of Hitler, and the ready acquiescence of Mussolini. The Duce was carried away by the prospect of the conquest of Egypt. And Hitler was not enthusiastic about the projected Malta operation, for the fatal Russian adventure was again exercising its dire influence, and exigency mothered fallacious argument:

The Fuehrer recognises how important it is to capture Malta. However, he does not believe that this can be done while the offensive on the eastern front is in progress, and especially not with Italian troops. During that time the air force cannot spare any transport planes. Once Tobruk is taken, most shipments will be routed to Tobruk via Crete. On the other hand, the British efforts to get convoys through to Malta from the east and from the west testify to the plight of the island.<sup>3</sup>

The German Naval Staff shared "the Fuehrer's doubts and misgivings particularly in regard to the Italians' ability to carry out the operation", but considered that, if German leadership had "the decisive word in its execution and if strong German forces are employed", the Malta operation could be carried out successfully without the help "of the air transport units so badly needed on the Eastern Front". The Naval Staff deprecated the Italian plaint of shortage of fuel oil, and considered "the request for an additional 40,000 tons exaggerated and ascribes it to the desire of the Italians to play absolutely safe". The Staff had reason "to believe that it will be possible to supply sufficient quantities of everything the army requires by means of escorted convoys and Italian transport submarines once the bridgehead has been established." Finally:

The operation is difficult and risky. However, in the long run the Naval Staff consider it still more risky not to carry out the operation. From the standpoint of strategy, the Naval Staff considers the occupation of Malta an absolute necessity and therefore mandatory for us if we want to continue shipping supplies to Africa, to protect our position in North Africa, and later hope to launch an attack against Suez. And we must keep in mind that conditions for taking Malta will in all probability never again be as favourable as they are this summer.<sup>4</sup>

But this counsel was disregarded. The assault on Malta was postponed, and Rommel was authorised to occupy the El Alamein gateway to the Nile Delta as a starting point for operations against the Suez Canal. As Admiral Weichold later wrote:

In this situation the Supreme German Command in agreement with the Italian Command decided to postpone the execution of the Malta operation. This far-reaching decision was made under the impression of the Panzer Army's success in the area of the Egyptian frontier. The commanders of the Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine in the Mediterranean were not party to this alteration in the plans, whilst the influence of Rommel turned the scales.

Field Marshal Kesselring, German Air Commander in the Mediterranean, and Weichold, pointed out to Rommel the supply difficulties he

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<sup>3</sup> *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*; conference between Raeder and Hitler at the Berghof, 15 June 1942.

<sup>4</sup> *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*. Conference between Raeder and Hitler at the Berghof, 15 June 1942, Annex 4.



would encounter in an advance "from the tactically favourable position on the Libyan-Egyptian frontier", and quoted the lessons of 1941 when "it had been learned at the cost of blood that the planning of a front without near-by harbours and without a secured sea supply route would not result in safe positions and would lead to a heavy defeat". But

Rommel considered the military situation on land so favourable and promising that he believed himself able to advance right into the Nile Delta in spite of all these difficulties. There the supply difficulties could be met from British supplies. The new plan of campaign was a terrific gamble, everything was staked on one card. Everything depended upon the lightning execution of the land operation. If this expectation was not fulfilled, heavy defeat would ensue. . . . Thus the die was cast in favour of the further development of the war in North Africa and the Mediterranean. Apparently the decision had been influenced by the tying down of German forces in the Russian war . . . and a desire of economising in German forces set aside for the Malta operation. After all the bitter lessons which the conduct of the war in the Mediterranean had taught, and after our solitary attempt to attain a naval point of view, the continental outlook was resumed and with it resultant decisions . . . the Great Plan for fighting the Mediterranean war in 1942, which had been part of a world wide or maritime total war of the Axis Powers, was finally given up. . . . The situation had become serious. It was necessary to prepare for the British counter-attack, which was certain to come.<sup>5</sup>

As in the Pacific so did events in the Mediterranean in June 1942 write the preface to a new chapter in the war in the European and Middle East Theatres.

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<sup>5</sup> Weichold, Essay.

## CHAPTER 4

### AUSTRALIA—JUNE 1942

**D**ISCUSSING the establishment of the South-West Pacific Area on 3rd April 1942, the American naval historian remarked:

Since Admiral King has been accused of attempting to hamper and restrict General MacArthur's command, it is worth recording that the addition of the Bismarcks and Solomons to it was his idea, as he felt it was essential to engage the attention of Australia to the defence of the approaches to their country, and shake them out of their isolationist attitude.<sup>1</sup>

Against the record of Australia's conduct with regard to the defence of her northern and north-eastern approaches, both before and during the war, it is difficult to see in what way her attention thereto needed engaging; and equally difficult to find reasons for Admiral King's seeing a necessity to shake the Australians "out of their isolationist attitude". As was pointed out earlier in this work<sup>2</sup> the importance of these island approaches in the defence of Australia was emphasised at the First World War peace conference by W. M. Hughes, who had a hard fight to secure the mandate over the Bismarck Archipelago and the northern Solomons, and who found it "difficult to make the Council of Ten realise how utterly the safety of Australia depended upon the possession of these islands . . . and that those who hold it [New Guinea] hold us". In the between-the-wars period the terms of the mandate precluded the fortifying of the islands. But within her powers Australia did what was possible to prepare defences. Most important was the establishment of the coastwatching organisation (now, in 1942, about to come into its own) in the islands as early as 1928, by which time there were thirteen coastwatchers positioned in New Guinea, thirteen in Papua, and ten in the Solomon Islands. In 1939 the island territories were included as areas in which members of the Australian Military Forces who had not volunteered for overseas service might be compelled to serve.

The extent to which the Australian Navy, Army and Air Force operated actively in these north-eastern areas during the war years since 1939 was in inverse proportion to the "isolationist attitude" to which, in Admiral King's view, she had resorted, and which resulted in her having most of her combat naval ships in action against the European Axis powers on the other side of the world, nearly all her battle-trained troops in the Middle East, and a large proportion of her air force also overseas fighting in the European and Middle Eastern theatres. Not until the Japanese actually struck in December 1941 were Australia's naval units recalled to the defence of Australia, and not for months thereafter were some of her experienced and battle-toughened soldiers brought back to take part in the

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<sup>1</sup> Morison, Vol IV, p. 249n.

<sup>2</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, p. 7.

defence of their homeland. Since the entry of the Japanese into the war the marked absence of an "isolationist attitude" had been demonstrated by all three of her Services fighting and suffering heavy casualties in Malaya, Singapore, and the Netherlands East Indies, and by her agreement to the British request that two of her three divisions in the Middle East should be transferred to Java and Sumatra. And, until the United States was able to reinforce—though first of all sparsely—the Allied naval and air forces operating in the north-eastern approaches, the R.A.N. Squadron, the R.A.A.F., and Australian soldiers filled the gap.

In June 1942 all ships of the R.A.N.—with the exception of the four "N" Class destroyers, and the three corvettes *Bathurst*, *Lismore*, and *Geraldton*,<sup>3</sup> which were with the Eastern Fleet—were serving on the Australia Station. Most of them were in the north-eastern area, where the main units formed the major part of the original Anzac Squadron and now comprised Task Force 44. In both Anzac Squadron and Task Force 44 they had been in action against the Japanese in defence of the north-eastern approaches to Australia. In June 1942 the cruisers *Australia*, *Canberra*, *Hobart*, *Adelaide*; A.M.C's *Westralia* and *Manoora*; destroyers *Arunta* and *Vendetta*; sloops *Warrego* and *Swan*; and minelayer *Bungaree*, were in eastern Australian waters. The destroyers *Stuart* and *Voyager* were based on Fremantle. Of the 24 corvettes on the Station, 16 were escorting and patrolling in the east and north-east areas; four were based on Darwin; and four on Fremantle.

At this time the total number of officers and men borne by the R.A.N. was nearly five times that of the permanent service when war broke out in 1939. There were, at 26th June 1942, 23,487 officers and men, of which number 14,646 were afloat, 6,477 were in shore services, and 2,364 were under training. Recruits at the rate of approximately 400 a month were at this time being obtained through R.A.N.R. recruiting in all States. Recruits signed for the duration of hostilities, and when entered were drafted to Flinders Naval Depot for a 20 weeks' intensive training course.

Rates of pay had increased on those ruling at the outbreak of war. Shortly—in October 1942—an ordinary seaman, 2nd class, was to receive double the 1s 9d a day which was his little lot in September 1939 (plus 6d a day deferred pay). The higher ratings were not fortunate enough to have their pay doubled, but on minimum rates an able seaman's 7s a day was increased to 8s 6d (plus 1s 9d a day deferred pay), and a chief petty officer's 11s a day became 12s 6d (plus 2s 7d a day deferred). The active rates of pay for executive officers ranged (at minimum rates) from 7s 6d a day for midshipmen; 12s 6d for sub-lieutenants; 20s for lieutenants; 31s 6d for lieutenant-commanders; 41s 6d for commanders; 61s 6d for captains; to 101s 6d for rear-admirals. Deferred pay stepped up at approximately 6d a rank from 3s a day for midshipmen to 6s a day for captains. A marriage allowance of 4s 6d a day was made to both officers and

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<sup>3</sup> HMAS *Geraldton*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

ratings, all of whom (except lieut-commanders and above) received daily allowances for children.

The daily active pay of Women's Royal Australian Naval Service ratings ranged (minimum) from 4s 4d for a W.R.A.N.-adult; 5s 8d leading W.R.A.N.; 6s 4d petty officer W.R.A.N.; to 7s chief petty officer W.R.A.N. Officers of the W.R.A.N.S. received: third officer, 11s active daily pay; second officer 16s; first officer 18s 6d and chief officer 21s. These ranks were equivalent to sub-lieutenant (third officer) through to commander (chief officer). In April 1942, the Royal Australian Naval Nursing Service was established. Rates of pay therein were: sister, 11s daily; superintending sister, 16s daily; matron, 18s 6d daily. The relative naval ranks were sub-lieutenant, lieutenant, and lieut-commander.

In addition to his pay, the sailor at sea or in shore establishments, had his keep—he was "victualled". As in the Royal Navy there were, in the R.A.N., three systems of victualling in use when the war broke out. The general mess system was in operation in most large ships and establishments. Under this, the Accountant or Stores Officer was responsible for the complete messing of the whole ship's company, except officers, in accordance with an approved standard providing for four meals a day—breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper. The daily victualling expenditure per man authorised for the R.A.N. was 1s 9d a day, except in small ships operating in northern waters, where an extra 5d was allowed. In smaller ships, up until early 1943 (when they were put under the general messing system) the standard ration system was in use. An allowance of provisions was made to messes together with a monetary allowance. Under the standard ration allowance each man was entitled to receive daily 12 oz bread, 9 to 12 oz fresh meat, 12 oz potatoes, 8 oz fresh vegetables, 2 oz butter, 3 oz sugar,  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz chocolate, 2 oz condensed milk or half-pint fresh milk, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz tea. Tea and chocolate were favourite drinks. The cry "The tea is wet" was welcome at any time on the mess decks, and the thick hot chocolate, or "kai", was an almost indispensable accompaniment of the night watch.

The R.A.N. was better off in victualling than the R.N.,<sup>4</sup> but showed to disadvantage against the U.S. Navy, with whose conditions Australians were now to be able to draw comparisons through close association. Such complaints as were voiced by members of Australian ships' companies (noted in a study of letters intercepted by the censor) with regard

<sup>4</sup> In a comparison between R.N. and R.A.N. victualling, a study of the Supply Organisation of the R.A.N. was prepared by a former Supply Chief Petty Officer, R.A.N., the late Mr C. Phillips, of Melbourne. Made for the Historical Research Section of the Navy Office, the study states: "The R.N. felt the rationing more than did the R.A.N. During the year 1942 a sea-going ship of the R.N. stationed in Home Waters was allowed 76 oz of meat per head a week—70 oz meat, 6 oz offal. In September 1944 the offal ration was reduced to 3 oz. Here in Australia, when rationing was introduced, the allowance was 96 oz of meat with bone, or 72 oz without bone per head per week. With the ration of butter the R.A.N. was also in a much better position. The allowance here was 12½ oz per week, while the R.N. were not allowed to exceed 2 oz in shore establishments and harbour ships. Seagoing ships of the R.N. in Home Waters were allowed two eggs per head per week, while again in Australia the supply was practically unlimited. While these figures do not actually show any comparison in the organisation of the two services, they do show how comparatively better catered for was the R.A.N., and how infinitely less the hardships of rationing were felt by our ships."

to the supply, preparation, and cooking of food, were largely based on this unfavourable comparison, though actually the number of complaints in ratio to the number of ships and men concerned was very small. Lack of green vegetables and other fresh provisions was the main grievance, and in this connection the similarly-designed ships of the R.N. and R.A.N. were woefully lacking in refrigeration and storage facilities.

As an example, when operating with American ships in northern waters, *Hobart*, with her complement, was entitled to draw the equivalent "unit" stores (a unit consisting of an issue of a complete variety of stores to a stated number of men) of that of an American ship with the same complement. But *Hobart* could store only approximately a third of the amount allowed. The refrigeration space of U.S.S. *Phoenix* (9,700 tons) was at least twice that of H.M.A. Ships *Australia* or *Shropshire* (10,000 tons), and nearly three times that of *Hobart* (7,105 tons). The average R.N. and R.A.N. cruiser could carry meat for 16 to 18 days, and butter for 28 to 30 days; but seven days was the absolute limit for fresh fruit and green vegetables; while eggs, when taken into the tropics, had to be used as quickly as possible because of lack of storage facilities. The American cruisers, on the other hand, with their huge refrigeration space, were ensured a prolonged supply of such items as meat, butter, eggs, fresh fruit and vegetables.

The respective conditions were similar in smaller ships. When, in 1943, Lieut-Commander Donovan<sup>5</sup> was Commanding Officer of the newly commissioned frigate *Gascoyne*,<sup>6</sup> he inspected the U.S. frigate *Long Beach*,<sup>7</sup> found her dry provisions storage of 97 days' endurance, fresh meat storage of 60 days, cool room storage of 17 days, and potato storage of 25 days, something to envy. He wrote: "*Gascoyne's* standard of messing does not get within cooee of that of *Long Beach*. They are messed on 75 cents a day home and 80 cents foreign [more than double the R.A.N. allowance] but their issuing prices are higher than ours. There is one interesting feature, namely, that the allowances vary with the type of ship, smaller complements getting higher than larger."

The American ships provided their companies with copious quantities of ice cream; and poultry, which the R.A.N. rating saw only as a Christmas treat, appeared regularly on the American rating's menu. This sort of comparison naturally was a source of discontent to the R.A.N. rating.

The opportunity to draw these comparisons provided, however, an urgent reason for removing the "odorous" part therefrom, and in 1942 the Australian naval authorities (as did the Admiralty) explored the possibilities of increasing storage space in the ships, and of introducing the cafeteria method of messing. Action was taken in both these matters early in 1943. The standard of cooking in the R.A.N. during the war was good, and improved. At Flinders Naval Depot cooks were fully trained

<sup>5</sup> Cdr J. Donovan, RAN. HMAS *Australia* 1939-42; Comd HMAS's *Platypus* 1942, *Gascoyne* 1943-44; DNOIC Moluccas Area 1945. Of Sydney; b. Fremantle, WA, 22 Oct 1902.

<sup>6</sup> HMAS *Gascoyne*, frigate (1943), 1,489 tons, two 4-in AA guns, 20 kts.

<sup>7</sup> *Long Beach*, US frigate (1943), 1,430 tons, three 3-in guns, 20 kts.

in the School of Cooking before being drafted to sea and, during the war years, 946 men trained there and qualified as cooks.

To cope with the increased work of victualling the enlarged navy, new victualling establishments had been opened by mid-1942 at Sydney, Melbourne, and Fremantle, and the merchant ships *Merkur* (12th December 1941) and *Charon* (18th March 1942) were taken up for use as victualling stores issuing ships. In addition, others were requisitioned and fitted out in Australia on behalf of the Admiralty and dispatched with stores for issue to H.M. Ships on the East Indies Station. Australia also supplied provisions in large quantities to Admiralty Victualling Yards at Alexandria, Colombo, Capetown, Durban, and to the War Board, India.

In June 1942 shipbuilding for the R.A.N. was in progress at ten yards in Australia—three in Queensland, five in New South Wales, one in Victoria and one in South Australia.<sup>8</sup> Of the main ships in the building program, one Tribal-class destroyer, *Arunta*, was completed, and commissioned on 30th March 1942. The second, *Warramunga*, launched on 7th February 1942, was fitting out. Six frigates were under construction, but none yet launched. Thirty corvettes, including 16 for the Admiralty and three for the Royal Indian Navy, were completed and commissioned; and 15 more were launched and fitting out, four of these for the Admiralty, and one for the R.I.N.<sup>9</sup> Four Fairmiles had been laid down. All ships built for the Admiralty and the R.I.N.—as well as those for the R.A.N.—were issued with their first outfit of naval stores in Australia.

The major modernisation of *Canberra*, to be similar to that of *Australia* completed on the eve of the outbreak of war in 1939, had been deferred, but consideration was given to the carrying out of modifications to increase her fighting efficiency and reliability. The matter was under discussion with the Admiralty, but as it would entail putting the ship out of action for at least twelve months, there was reluctance to embark on the work in the existing shortage of cruisers. But in addition to the actual shipbuilding, considerable repair, conversion, and other work was carried out in Australian ports. Up to the end of June 1942, a total of 288 merchant ships (64 of them Australian) were fitted with defensive armament; 275 (100 of them Australian) were fitted with paravane mine protection gear; and 296 (110 Australian) were degaussed.

By this time Australia was manufacturing much of the necessary armament stores required by the navy. Nearly all the ammunition requirements

<sup>8</sup> Queensland: Walkers Ltd, Maryborough (frigates, corvettes); Evans Deakin & Co, Brisbane (frigates, corvettes); Norman Wright, Bulimba (Fairmile motor launches). New South Wales: Cockatoo Dockyard, Sydney (Tribal destroyers, frigates, corvettes); Morts Dock & Engineering Co, Sydney (frigates, corvettes); Poole & Steele Ltd, Sydney (corvettes); Lars Halvorsen & Sons Pty Ltd, Sydney (Fairmiles); N.S.W. State Dockyard, Newcastle (corvettes). Victoria: Naval Dockyard, Williamstown (corvettes). South Australia: Broken Hill Pty Co Ltd, Whyalla (corvettes).

<sup>9</sup> These 15 ships, all of which commissioned before the end of the year were (commissioning dates in parenthesis): *Wallaroo* (15 July); *Broome* (29 July) Admiralty; *Dubbo* (31 July); *Bengal* (5 August) R.I.N.; *Tamworth* (8 August) Admiralty; *Gawler* (14 August) Admiralty; *Echuca* (7 September); *Bundaberg* (12 September); *Inverell* (17 September); *Pirie* (10 October) Admiralty; *Kapunda* (21 October); *Gympie* (4 November); *Latrobe* (6 November); *Bowen* (9 November); *Horsham* (18 November).

for H.M.A. Ships, and for H.M. Ships of the New Zealand Navy, were obtained in Australia. Ammunition for the Tribal-class destroyers, except for a few components, was made locally; and armament stores for the corvettes, including 4-inch High Angle/Low Angle guns and mountings were under manufacture. The first gun had passed proof, and was going into production at the ordnance factory at Bendigo. The manufacture of 4.7-inch and 6-inch hardened shell was in progress. The production of locally manufactured naval mines was 5,000 a year, the output being shared between the R.A.N. and R.N., with small quantities for New Zealand and Noumea. The minelayer H.M.A.S. *Bungaree*, with a laying capacity of 423 units, had laid 3,190 mines by June 1942, mostly in the north and north-eastern waters. Seaward defences at naval bases were being developed. Indicator loops were in position and operating at Sydney, Fremantle, and Darwin. An anti-torpedo net was in operation at Fremantle, and the main section of the anti-submarine boom defences at Darwin was completed, with extensions still under construction. At Sydney, the anti-midget submarine boom was being completed.

During the second half of 1941 the Admiralty, anticipating a Far Eastern war, began to review bases in the eastern theatre, and in December of that year opened discussions with the Naval Board on the subject of bases in Australia. The Admiralty's policy, as stated in a Dominions Office cable to the Commonwealth Government of 27th January 1942, was the development of Sydney and Fremantle to accommodate the entire Eastern Fleet, with Darwin and Hobart as operational bases. Over succeeding weeks negotiations continued between the British, Australian, and American authorities. In April, at the request of Comsouwespac, Vice-Admiral Leary, a Board, comprising representatives of the U.S. and Australian Services and the Commonwealth Government, was convened to study requirements. Naval members of the Board (which met as a whole only once) were Commander R. F. Nichols, R.N.; Commander H. J. Buchanan,<sup>1</sup> R.A.N.; and Commander M. R. Kelley, U.S.N. On 29th May the Combined Chiefs of Staff, Washington, issued a directive: "Agreement for the Planning, Operation, and Provision of Personnel for Naval Bases." In accordance with this directive, which remained the basis for the provision of base facilities in Australia, the United States was liable, with the assistance of Australia, for the establishment of naval bases, with the proviso that projects already approved by the Admiralty should go ahead with, where necessary, assistance from the Royal Navy. All material received in Australia from U.S. pools should be handled, installed, and as far as possible operated by Australians. The exceptions were the U.S. submarine services at Fremantle, and such supply and ammunition activities as were essential to the support of the U.S. Navy. The Admiralty plan which was the original basis for all projects was, with some small modifications, adhered

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<sup>1</sup> Rear-Adm H. J. Buchanan, CBE, DSO; RAN. HMS *Diomedé* 1939-40; comd HMS's *Valentine*, *Vanity* 1940-41, HMAS *Norman* 1943-44; Capt (D) HMAS *Napier* 1944-45; DCNS 1945-46. B. Melbourne, 10 Mar 1902.

to, with a gradual diminishing of importance of Australian bases as operations moved north.

There were, in June 1942, changes in the composition of the Naval Board. On the 29th, Captain G. D. Moore, R.A.N., as Commodore 2nd Class, assumed duty as Second Naval Member vice Captain J. W. Durnford, who reverted to the Royal Navy. And Mr H. G. Brain was succeeded as Business Member of the Board by Mr Nesbitt.<sup>2</sup>

## II

The events in May and June in both the eastern and western war theatres had their immediate repercussions in Australia. During May, in a series of telegrams to Mr Curtin from London, Dr Evatt outlined the grand strategy decided upon by the United Kingdom and United States Governments during Mr Churchill's visit to Washington some six months earlier:

The strategy contemplated Germany's defeat before that of Japan. In a phrase, it was "beat Hitler first". The existence of this written agreement came as a great surprise to myself and, I have no doubt, to you. We were not consulted about the matter and neither Page [in London] nor Casey [in Washington] ever reported to us about it. Owing apparently to the U.S. Government's desire for secrecy it took some little insistence to get the document here.<sup>3</sup>

Commenting on this grand strategy, Evatt remarked that in spite of the policy of "beat Hitler first", there was reiterated insistence in clauses in the document concerned that the security of Australia must be maintained, though a clause in an aide-mémoire "of recent date" asserted "for a number of reasons, some of them very unconvincing, that a full-scale invasion of Australia is unlikely". Broadly the essential features of the grand strategy were:

(1) the realisation of a victorious program of armaments, which first and foremost require the security of the main areas of war industry [the U.K. and the U.S.A.]; (2) the maintenance of essential communications; (3) closing and tightening the ring around Germany; (4) wearing down and undermining German resistance by air bombardment, blockade, subversive activities and propaganda; (5) the continuous development of offensive action against Germany; (6) maintaining only such positions in the Eastern Theatre as will safeguard vital interests and deny to Japan access to raw materials vital to her continuous war effort while we are concentrating on the defeat of Germany.<sup>4</sup>

This broad strategy remained "fundamentally unchanged" in May 1942, at the time of Evatt's telegrams, and he remarked "I think that we can now appreciate the background in which General MacArthur's directive was drafted. The strategy defined in it was primarily defensive in character. The offensive was to take place in the future."

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<sup>2</sup> R. H. Nesbitt, Business Member, Aust Naval Board 1943-44, Air Board 1944-48, Mil Board 1946-47; Board of Business Administration 1943-46. B. Douglas, *Isle of Man*, 24 Jun 1883.

<sup>3</sup> Telegram of 28 May 1942, Evatt to Curtin, ET 30.

<sup>4</sup> Telegram of 28 May 1942, Evatt to Curtin, ET 31.



As to "closing and tightening the ring round Germany", this ring was defined as

a line running roughly as follows: Archangel-Black Sea-Anatolia-the northern seaboard of the Mediterranean-the western seaboard of Europe. The main object will be to strengthen this ring, and close the gaps in it, by sustaining the Russian front, by arming and supporting Turkey, by increasing our strength in the Middle East and by assuming possession of the whole of the North African coast.

An Allied return to the Continent—across the Mediterranean, from Turkey into the Balkans, or by landings in Western Europe—was foreseen as a possibility in 1943.

As to Australia, the reasons advanced (in the aide-mémoire of May) for the unlikelihood of her invasion on a large scale by Japan were (1) it would involve an enormous additional commitment; (2) lack of communications ruled out land invasion from northern Australia; (3) sea-borne invasion of eastern or southern Australia would involve the invader in a highly risky venture; (4) Japan could more easily accomplish her main object—consolidation of her gains—by getting astride American-Australian Pacific communications; (5) Japan must be prepared for war with Russia; (6) operations against India would bring greater profit to Japan than would control of Australia. The aide-mémoire went on to say that apart from American-British intentions of giving Australia all practicable help, she was depended upon as a base for the final offensive against Japan. But it was remarked that the utmost care must be taken in "relating her defence requirements to our general war strategy, and to our forecast of enemy intentions".

As an earnest of its concern in Australia's safety, the British Government at this time (May 1942) told Evatt that its representative in Washington, Field Marshal Sir John Dill, had been informed that though Australia was in the sphere of U.S. strategical responsibility, "it is the firm intention of H.M.'s Government in the United Kingdom that this circumstance will not lessen in any way their regard for Australian interests", and Dill was instructed to press the United States Chiefs of Staff for assurances that Australia's security would be safeguarded. The British War Cabinet also endorsed Churchill's reaffirmation of the undertaking to "cut losses in the Mediterranean and proceed to your aid" should Japan set about invading Australia or New Zealand "on a large scale". And finally, at Churchill's instance, the British Government decided to send a wing of three Spitfire fighter squadrons to Australia. They would be shipped in a convoy leaving in the middle of June, and would be fully maintained.<sup>5</sup>

Before the occurrence of the Battle of Midway and its results were known in Australia, General MacArthur and the Australian Chiefs of Staff had examined and commented upon the telegrams discussed above, and advocated "striking at Japan as soon as possible", supporting this advocacy by citing a statement by Churchill that the Eastern Fleet

<sup>5</sup> Telegram of 28 May from Evatt to Curtin—ET 33—quoting letter received by Evatt from Churchill's COS, General Ismay.

was now strong enough to hold Ceylon and prevent an attack on Western Australia. A draft telegram of 4th June from Curtin to Evatt indicated that the Australian authorities had now come round to the British opinion that a large-scale Japanese invasion of Australia was unlikely. The draft said:

In addition to the increased Allied naval and air strength, the rapid development of the Australian land forces and the additional American reinforcements have made a large-scale operation against the vital centres of Australia a difficult task already, and with every additional month of training and increasing equipment, the task will become more difficult for the enemy.

This telegram, however, was never sent. In a message of 12th June, Curtin told Evatt that, in discussion with MacArthur, it had been decided not to send it "in its present form because of changed strategical situation" arising from the Japanese defeat at Midway. Instead, it was decided to adopt a suggestion made by the Australian Chiefs of Staff and try, through the Australian representatives on the Pacific War Councils in London and Washington,<sup>6</sup> to secure acceptance in the grand strategy of the view that the South-West Pacific Area could make a positive contribution in 1942 towards winning the war. A commitment would thus be established which would result in an increased flow of men and materials to this theatre. General MacArthur took this aspect up with General Marshall in the light of the results of the Coral Sea and Midway actions. And he told Curtin that, as a result of Coral Sea and Midway, "in his view the defensive position of Australia was now assured".

MacArthur amplified his views in a discussion with the Advisory War Council on 17th June, when he said that since his previous meeting with the council in March there had been a complete transformation of the war situation as affecting Australia.<sup>7</sup> The differences were both internal and external. Examining the internal situation, he briefly surveyed the progress made in Australia in planning, in industrial production, and in the expansion, training, and equipping of the three combat Services. On the external side, he reviewed the progress of the war in the Pacific, a war that had been

a battle for land bases for aircraft. . . . All the Japanese victories since 8th December had been gained through air superiority, their advance having been made under cover of land-based aircraft. This was illustrated in connection with the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*. . . . Admiral Phillips failed in his mission, but his was the finest decision of the war. The cause of our defeats in the Pacific is our failure to challenge Japanese sea power. . . . The Coral Sea action was the most crucial

<sup>6</sup> The Pacific War Council was set up in Washington—largely at the instigation of Australia, which sought a voice in "higher" policy—and held its first meeting on 1st April 1942. The Council had no executive responsibility, and kept no formal records of its proceedings. It was attended by representatives of Great Britain, Australia, China, New Zealand, Canada, the Netherlands and the Philippines, and the President of the USA presided over meetings. Visiting Dominion Prime (or other senior) Ministers attended. Chiefs of Staff attended only when requested—which was seldom. In May 1943, Sir Owen Dixon, then Australian Minister to USA, reported to the Advisory War Council that the Pacific War Council was not an effective body. "It provided an opportunity to inspect the mind of the President, but it had no other advantage." Mr Churchill, when he attended a Washington meeting in June 1942, said it was a replica of the Council in London.

<sup>7</sup> AWC Minute, M967, 17 June 1942.

incident of the war insofar as Australia was concerned. Had the enemy been successful, Australia would have been placed on the defensive indefinitely, or even worse. . . . The results of Coral Sea and the successes gained at Midway Island had assured the defensive position of Australia.

MacArthur's assertion that Allied failure to challenge Japanese sea power was the cause of our defeats in the Pacific overlooked basic factors. Actually the cause lay in the ability hitherto enjoyed by the Japanese to concentrate overwhelming local superiority of naval (both surface and air) strength in every action in which the opposing forces had met prior to Coral Sea. It was the cause of the failure of Phillips, despite his making "the finest decision of the war". MacArthur, in his address to the council on this occasion, also erred in his conviction that the Japanese had decided to attack Russia, though he could not forecast when the attack would be made. He said that 30 Japanese divisions were being concentrated against Siberia, and the reason for the Japanese attack on the Aleutians was to cut this line of communication between the United States and Siberia. Events, too, were to prove him in error on the question of a Second Front. He expressed his opposition to the policy of defeating Germany first, and his view that it was not strategically possible to build up a second European front. "Fifty divisions would be required for this, but the United Kingdom could not spare more than eighteen to twenty. To send the remaining troops from the United States would involve demands on shipping which could not possibly be met for four or five years. Moreover, in view of the defensive preparations in the Low Countries and in France, it was very doubtful whether an army could get through." At the same time the general told the Advisory War Council "that if he had to choose between fighting the Germans and the Japanese, he would prefer to fight the Germans. The German forces were not balanced, whereas the Japanese have a thoroughly balanced force comprising an efficient navy and army, and the finest air force in the world." He rated the British air force as the second most efficient.

MacArthur said that the battle for sea communications was the most crucial, with the Russian front second; and he emphasised that the best way to help Russia would be to establish a second front in the Pacific. He recommended an offensive aimed at the recapture of New Guinea and Rabaul, as the preliminary to a thrust either to the Philippines or through the Netherlands East Indies to Malaya, personally favouring the first-mentioned. In order to recapture and hold Rabaul and New Guinea it would be necessary to provide additional aircraft, additional troops trained in amphibious operations, and additional naval units, including aircraft carriers. He said that an amphibious division would be required initially. When trained, three divisions (7th Australian and the 32nd and 41st American) would be used as supporting forces. It would take six weeks to organise for these operations from the time of receipt of material and equipment.

The Advisory War Council discussed the information furnished by MacArthur "with particular reference to his views on the inevitability of a Japanese attack on Russia and the importance of establishing a second front in the Pacific". It was decided that it would be inadvisable for the Commonwealth Government to make further representations to Washington and London on a political plane, since Evatt already knew the views of the Government and the Commander-in-Chief, and since MacArthur had recently communicated his views to the Chiefs of Staff, Washington.<sup>8</sup> Curtin, however, intimated that he would consider a suggestion, made by Spender<sup>9</sup> and McEwen,<sup>1</sup> that the Government's views should be re-stated to the High Commissioner in London and to the Australian Minister in Washington.

Certain of MacArthur's views were, apparently, shared by Churchill and Roosevelt. At a meeting of the Pacific War Council in Washington on 25th June,<sup>2</sup> Churchill said that the Japanese had moved 250 of their aircraft north and had sent more divisions from Japan to the north. "All this seemed to point to a Japanese onslaught on Russia." He wondered if the Pacific War Council might now record three conclusions: (1) that a northerly move by way of attack from Australia should be contemplated; (2) that preparations should be made for a counter-attack on Japan from India; (3) that guerilla forces should be encouraged to resist in captured areas. Regarding a statement by Dr Soong that Chiang Kai-shek had information of messages exchanged between the Germans and Japanese on the subject of synchronised naval operations (this matter, as previously mentioned, was at this time under constant discussion between the respective enemy naval staffs), the President concurred in Soong's view "that this might point to a cooperation in connection with an attack on Russia in which the Aleutian Islands might play a part".

The probability of a Japanese attack on Russia was not, however, envisaged by the American high command, who concluded "that there would be no Russo-Japanese war for a long time and that the Aleutians could be crossed off as the scene of an enemy offensive".<sup>3</sup> Nor were they at one with MacArthur in his proposal immediately to attempt the recapture of New Guinea and Rabaul.

<sup>8</sup> President Roosevelt, in a letter in May to MacArthur commenting on MacArthur's pleas about the Pacific, wrote: "I fully appreciate the difficulties of your position. They are the same kind of difficulties which I am having with the Russians, British, Canadians, Mexicans, Indians, Persians and others at different points of the compass. Not one of them is wholly satisfied but I am at least succeeding in keeping all of them reasonably satisfied and have so far avoided any real rows." M. Matloff and E. M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare: 1941-1942* (1953), p. 214, a volume in the official series *United States Army in World War II*.

<sup>9</sup> Hon Sir Percy Spender, KCVO, KBE. MHR 1937-51; Treasurer 1940; Min for Army 1940-41, for External Affrs 1949-51; Ambassador to USA 1951-58; Judge of the International Ct of Justice at The Hague 1958-67, President 1964-67. B. Sydney, 5 Oct 1897.

<sup>1</sup> Rt Hon J. McEwen. MHR since 1934. Min for External Affrs 1940, for Air and Civil Aviation 1940-41, for Commerce and Agriculture 1949-56, for Trade 1956-63, for Trade and Industry since 1963; Prime Minister Dec 1967-Jan 1968. B. Chiltern, Vic, 29 Mar 1900.

<sup>2</sup> Among those present were President Roosevelt, Mr Churchill, Mr Mackenzie King (Prime Minister of Canada), Dr T. V. Soong (representing President Chiang Kai-shek), President Quezon of the Philippines, and Sir Owen Dixon. (Telegram from Dixon to Commonwealth Government, 26 June 1942, No. S.61.)

<sup>3</sup> Morison, Vol IV, p. 259.

. . . the Joint Chiefs (greatly to the relief of the [U.S.] Navy) turned down this proposal for several reasons. No transports were yet available for troop lift. Rabaul, at the end of an "air pipeline" from Japan, could be readily and steadily reinforced by the enemy, yet was beyond fighter-plane range from the air bases then in Allied possession. There is no doubt that the decision against moving into Rabaul was wise. In June 1942 the balance of naval power in the Pacific was too delicate to warrant an attempt to seize and hold a position so exposed to Japanese counter-attack.<sup>4</sup>

### III

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognised that the Pacific War, whose battleground was Earth's largest ocean—greater in area than that of all the land surfaces combined—was essentially a naval war. But inability adequately to reinforce the Pacific Fleet precluded the possibility of challenging the Japanese Navy in an advance into the Gilberts and Marshalls at this juncture.

This inability resulted from the decision of President Roosevelt to subjugate all other American commitments to that of BOLERO—the build-up of American forces in Britain in preparation for an invasion of Europe. In mid-April the British Government agreed to accept in principle an American War Department plan for the cross-Channel invasion of France in 1943, with a possible preliminary landing operation in 1942 if Russia's plight demanded urgent help. This plan, prepared by the head of the Army Plans and Operations Staff, Major-General Dwight D. Eisenhower, was presented in London by General Marshall and Harry L. Hopkins. The precursor to its implementation was operation BOLERO. In May, Molotov, the Russian Commissar for Foreign Affairs, arrived in London to finalise details of a treaty of Alliance, and to press for a second front in an invasion of Europe. The treaty, to be of twenty years' duration, was signed on 26th May (Dr Evatt was among those present at the ceremony), but Molotov failed to obtain from the British any promise of a landing in 1942. In Washington, where he went from London, he received a more encouraging hearing, based on the failure of the Americans—particularly the President's close advisers, the Secretary of State for War, Henry L. Stimson, and General Marshall—to grasp the realities of what such a landing would entail in ships, air power, army divisions, and the possibilities of failure at this juncture. President Roosevelt told Molotov that he expected the formation of a second front in 1942, and at the end of May the President, in a message to Churchill, proposed August of that year as the latest date for a landing.

Though, when Molotov passed through London on his way back to Russia from Washington, a communiqué was published on 11th June stating that "full understanding was reached with regard to the urgent tasks of creating a Second Front in Europe in 1942", care was taken by the British Prime Minister to make clear, in an aide-mémoire handed to Molotov, that it was impossible to say in advance whether such an operation would be feasible in 1942, and "we can therefore give no promise in

<sup>4</sup> Morison, Vol IV, p. 258.

the matter". Actually, the British were fully aware that no cross-Channel landing of permanency could be effected in 1942, nor, probably, in 1943; and within the next few weeks they convinced Roosevelt of that fact. An alternative operation was sought.

For many months Churchill had fostered the idea of the occupation of all French North Africa. In October 1941, on the eve of General Auchinleck's CRUSADER attack on the Axis forces in Libya, Churchill, in a letter to Roosevelt, outlined British ideas and plans for the prosecution of the war, and envisaged the sequence CRUSADER, ACROBAT (conquest of Tripolitania) and GYMNAST (entry into North-West Africa with French help and invitation). For the purpose of GYMNAST a force equivalent to one armoured and three infantry divisions, with shipping, was held ready in Britain. With the entry of Japan into the war, Churchill, in a paper dated 16th December 1941 (when the CRUSADER operation was going well, with Tobruk relieved and the victorious British advancing on Derna) urged upon Roosevelt the desirability of sending forces to North Africa if "even the connivance of Vichy to French North Africa coming over to our side" could be obtained. Britain had her GYMNAST force ready, and desired that the United States would promise to bring into North Africa "not less than 150,000 men during the next six months".<sup>5</sup>

Now, six months later, against the background of all that had happened on the widely spread battle fronts, the British held to this concept, and to the conviction that the occupation of the whole of North Africa was the maximum "second front" effort which could be made in the western hemisphere during 1942. And to this view—against those of Stimson and Marshall, and of MacArthur and the votaries of the immediate establishment of a second front in the Pacific—President Roosevelt now leaned.

#### IV

Meanwhile, in the Pacific, Admiral King also had a concept to which he adhered. In the middle of February he requested Joint Chiefs of Staff approval of the establishment of an American base in the New Hebrides at Efate Island, visualising it as the first of a series of strong points "from which a step-by-step general advance could be made through the New Hebrides, Solomons and Bismarcks".<sup>6</sup> As mentioned, the Efate garrison and engineers reached there in H.M.A.S. *Westralia* on 18th March, and early in April fighter aircraft were operating thence from a 4,000-foot air strip in the jungle. Development at Efate was planned to provide a secure anchorage and limited supply base for a large task force, and air facilities for two carrier-based and two land-based air groups. Efate's establishment as a base was another of the moves and counter-moves which marked the beginning of the struggle for the Solomons-New Hebrides-New Caledonia key strip of islands, possession of which would control sea communications between the U.S.A. and Australia. The opening gambit

<sup>5</sup> Churchill, Vol III (1950), p. 576.

<sup>6</sup> Morison, Vol IV, p. 246.

was the Japanese invasion of New Britain and capture of Rabaul in January. It was followed by their incursion into northern New Guinea, Buka, and Bougainville in March. In that month the Americal Division landed in New Caledonia, and the Efate garrison was established. In May the Japanese got a foothold farther south in the Solomons at Tulagi, and in that month the Americans made another counter move, shifting the original Efate garrison some 180 miles farther north in the New Hebrides to form a new base ("Button") on the island of Espiritu Santo.

The defence of the Pacific communications threatened by the Japanese in their southward penetration was by now entrusted to Vice-Admiral Ghormley, who in April was appointed to command the South Pacific Force and Area. On 28th May—the day that Base "Button" was started—he hoisted his flag in U.S.S. *Rigel*<sup>7</sup> in Auckland Harbour, New Zealand. At this time the only combat ships Ghormley had under his command were those of Task Force 44, comprising H.M.A. Ships *Australia*, *Canberra*, *Hobart*; and U.S. Ships *Chicago*, *Salt Lake City*, and destroyers. Rear-Admiral Crace was about to relinquish operational command of this force, to return to the Royal Navy, and on 13th June he was succeeded by Rear-Admiral Crutchley.<sup>8</sup>

The Japanese, too, were making local command changes. Formerly the Bismarcks, the Solomons, and the Coral Sea, had been the responsibility of the *Fourth Fleet* under Vice-Admiral Inouye, who had exercised command at the Battle of the Coral Sea from his flagship *Kashima* at Rabaul. On 14th July a new force—the *Eighth Fleet*—was activated to take over the area, with Vice-Admiral Gumichi Mikawa, formerly second-in-command to Vice-Admiral Nagumo, as Commander-in-Chief. He arrived at Truk with his staff on 25th July, in *Chokai*. The next day the *Eighth Fleet* assumed the responsibilities of the *Outer South Sea Force*, vice *Fourth Fleet*.<sup>9</sup>

On 30th July Mikawa, in *Chokai*, arrived at Rabaul, then in process of building up into a major naval and air base, its two large airstrips growing to five or six, with others at Gasmata, Lae, Salamaua, and Buka. It was the attempted extension of this chain of airfields to the southern Solomons which gave rise to the fires seen on the grass plains of Guadalcanal on 20th June, and spurred the Americans to urgent efforts to dislodge the Japanese from Tulagi, and from Guadalcanal before an airfield could be established on that island.

<sup>7</sup> *Rigel*, US repair ship (1922), 5,551 tons, four 5-in guns, 10½ kts.

<sup>8</sup> Admiral Sir Victor Crutchley, VC, KCB, DSC; RN. (1914-18: HMS's *Centurion*, *Brilliant* and *Vindictive*.) Comd HMS *Warspite* 1937-40, Australian Squadron 1942-44; Flag Offr Gibraltar 1945-57. B. 2 Nov 1893.

<sup>9</sup> *Eighth Fleet* was originally formed on 10th June as part of the Japanese plan for the invasion of New Caledonia, Fiji, and Samoa. As *Outer South Sea Force*, it was now responsible for the defence of the area south of the equator and east of 141 degrees East longitude, the meridian marking the boundary between Dutch and Australian New Guinea. Mikawa's original force comprised *Chokai* (flag); 6th Cruiser Squadron, *Aoba*, *Kako*, *Kinugasa*, and *Furutaka*; light cruisers *Yubari*, *Tatsuta*, *Tenryu*; and destroyers *Yunagi*, *Uzuki*, and *Yuzuki*.

## CHAPTER 5

### GUADALCANAL—PACIFIC HINGE-PIN

WHILE events moved towards a clash at the southern end of the key island chain, similar moves at the northern end—in the Bismarck Archipelago and New Guinea—laid the future's foundations there. The Japanese stronghold at Rabaul, with the subsidiary bases at Lae, Salamaua, Gasmata, Kavieng, Finschhafen, Buka, Faisi, Lorengau and Kieta, were a constant and growing threat to Allied communications and to Australia's northern defences. At this period Rabaul, headquarters of *8th Base Force*, which was responsible for the defence of the area, was the only major Japanese command of land-based air forces maintaining heavy and continuous air action against the enemy. Here the *25th Air Flotilla*, under the command of Rear-Admiral Yamada, concentrated its full strength against Port Moresby in frequent attacks, usually with heavy formations of 27 or more bombers escorted by an equal number of Zero fighters.<sup>1</sup>

The expansion of existing Allied aerodrome facilities was considered the best method of countering this threat. To an extent the Japanese were at a disadvantage in that Truk, their nearest base to Rabaul, was sea-separated from them by some 700 miles, and their home bases were more than three times that distance away. All supplies and reinforcements, including fighter aircraft, were of necessity seaborne, and replacements took from two to three weeks. Australia could reinforce New Guinea more rapidly, and her seaborne communications (Townsville to Milne Bay or Moresby approximately 600 miles) could be under good air protection after the provision of suitable airfields.

This provision was now being made. In a report to the American Chiefs of Staff on 2nd August 1942, General MacArthur told how airfields had been established "progressively northward along the north-east coast of Australia". The report continued:

First step was to develop the Townsville-Cloncurry area: engineers and protective garrisons, and finally Air Force units were moved into that area and Moresby used as an advanced stopping off aerodrome; the second step was then instituted by strengthening Port Moresby garrison to two Australian infantry brigades and miscellaneous units, moving in engineers and AA units to build and protect aerodromes and dispersal facilities, developing fields further northward along the Australian mainland through York Peninsula and movement forward thereto of protection garrisons and air elements; this step was largely completed early in June although some of the movement of engineers into undeveloped areas of the York Peninsula and the construction of airfields was incomplete, but rapidly progressing.

The third step was to be the establishment of more aerodromes in New Guinea, including one at Merauke to the west, 180 miles north-west of

<sup>1</sup> For instance on 5th July Moresby had its 68th raid, when 20 bombers attacked Seven Mile aerodrome at 10.12 a.m. and 14 minutes later another seven bombers attacked the same aerodrome.



Cape York, and one in the vicinity of Abau, on the south coast of New Guinea some 400 miles due east of Cape York. The Abau site, however, was found to be unsuitable, and MacArthur authorised instead the construction of an aerodrome at Milne Bay.

Milne Bay, a deep-water indentation running almost due west some 20 miles into the extreme south-east point of New Guinea, lies approximately 200 miles E.S.E. of Port Moresby. The bay's southern shore is formed by the Cloudy Mountains Peninsula, the heights of which fall steeply from some 3,000 feet to a narrow coastal plain broadening towards the head of the bay, which here forms the eastern, coral-fringed shore of the relatively low isthmus separating Cloudy Mountains Peninsula from the remainder of Papua. On its north shore Milne Bay is bounded by a long, tapering peninsula whose high spine is the Stirling Range, the knife-edge ridges of which gradually fall from some 4,000 feet in the west to its terminus at East Cape, New Guinea's eastern extremity on Goschen Strait. There is little coral along the northern shore of the bay, which in its western half is fringed by muddy beaches, broken occasionally by wooded rises, and backed by a narrow coastal strip between the shore and the mountains. Varying between a quarter mile and a mile in width, this strip consists mainly of thick jungle and sago swamps, interspersed with occasional coconut plantations. In the eastern half of the north shore, the beaches are sandy. About seven miles wide at its entrance, Milne Bay has a greatest width of about 10 miles half way along its length.

By sea from Australia or Port Moresby, the approach to Milne Bay is through the lovely China Strait, separating Papua's second port—the small island of Samarai—from the mainland. At this stage of the war in 1942 Milne Bay occupied a key strategic position as the staging point for the Allied advance along the north coast of New Guinea. In relation to Port Moresby it was in a position analogous to that in the Mediterranean of Mersa Matruh in relation to Alexandria and the Libyan coast. Its immediate weaknesses were the torrential rains of the wet season just beginning, malaria, and complete lack of shipping berths and cargo-handling facilities.

The construction of an airfield at Milne Bay was authorised by G.H.Q. on 12th June. That afternoon H.M.A.S. *Warrego*, which had sailed at day-break escorting the Dutch ship *Karsik* to Townsville, was recalled with her charge to Port Moresby to form part of the first convoy to Milne Bay. *Warrego*'s commanding officer, Lieut-Commander A. H. Green, R.A.N., had previous experience of the type of operations now in train when he was Naval Liaison Officer at General O'Connor's headquarters in the Western Desert in 1940-41. On 18th June, Commander R. B. A. Hunt, the N.O.I.C. Port Moresby, went with Brigadier-General Martin F. Scanlon, Commander of the Allied Air Forces, New Guinea, to Milne Bay to investigate the proposed aerodrome site. On Hunt's instructions a sketch survey of the area had been prepared by Sub-Lieutenant I. F. Champion, R.A.N.V.R., commanding officer of *Laurabada*, and in consultation with him Hunt decided that it would be practicable to place a vessel of *Karsik*'s

type alongside near Gili Gili, at the north-west head of the bay, provided that two earth ramps and floating pontoons could be built at short notice. This work was at once undertaken by Captain Rich<sup>2</sup> of Angau. Hunt returned to Port Moresby to find that during his absence the Burns Philp ship *Macdhui*, damaged in an air raid on the harbour the previous day, had again been the target for Japanese bombers in Moresby's 62nd air raid on the 18th and (as stated earlier in this volume) became a total loss.

The first convoy to Milne Bay, consisting of *Karsik* loaded with supplies and equipment, and another Dutch ship, *Bontekoe*, carrying about 800 troops, including Australian troops and American engineers, escorted by *Warrego* (with Champion on board as pilot), and *Ballarat* (Lieut-Commander A. D. Barling), sailed from Moresby on 24th June and reached Milne Bay at noon next day. *Bontekoe* disembarked her troops into local schooners, and sailed with *Ballarat* as escort at dawn on the 26th. *Karsik* berthed alongside at Gili Gili to discharge her cargo, with *Warrego*, disguised and camouflaged with shrubs and branches, lying near by. Captain Rich had done his part with an improvised wharf, and Green, in *Warrego*, found *Karsik*'s discharging "proceeding satisfactorily. Locally constructed petrol drum pontoon in use, greatly facilitated unloading. A.I.F. working extremely well; 250 native boys, recruited by District Officer, Samarai, working exceptionally well. (Payment, one stick of trade tobacco, and one lb of rice per diem.)"<sup>3</sup> *Karsik* completed discharging at 8.30 a.m. on 28th June, and the two ships sailed for Australia.

## II

While these events were taking place at the northern end of the island line, Admiral King took initiating action with regard to the southern. In a memorandum to General Marshall on 25th June he proposed mounting an offensive in the South Pacific about 1st August, using the 1st Marine Division, then on its way from the United States to New Zealand. Such an amphibious operation to retake Tulagi had been suggested by Admiral Nimitz, to be covered by two carrier task forces he had ready at Pearl Harbour. Marshall liked the idea, but suggested that the operation be entrusted to MacArthur, to which King replied, on 26th June, that it could not be conducted in any other way than under the direction of Commander-in-Chief, Pacific. "One can readily understand why," commented the American naval historian.<sup>4</sup> "The only amphibiously trained troops available were Marines; the only troop lift available was Navy transports; the only covering and supporting force (other than Ghormley's tiny force) was the Pacific Fleet. And the only assistance that MacArthur could render would be land-based air cover from distant Australian fields." King suggested that MacArthur could come in after the amphibious phase,

<sup>2</sup> Maj M. C. W. Rich. Angau 1942-44. Assistant Resident Magistrate; of Samarai, Papua; b. Samarai, 21 Nov 1903.

<sup>3</sup> Report of Proceedings, HMAS *Warrego*, June 1942.

<sup>4</sup> Morison, Vol IV, p. 260.

and with Pacific Fleet support take charge of troop movement into the southern Solomons, and consolidation of the area. Marshall agreed, and a Joint Chiefs of Staff directive, which with some modifications governed Allied movements in the South Pacific for the next eighteen months, was produced, dated 2nd July. Summarised, this directive was:

- (i) *Ultimate Objectives*: Seizure and occupation of the New Britain-New Ireland-New Guinea area.
- (ii) *Tasks*:
  1. Operation WATCHTOWER. Seize and occupy the Santa Cruz Islands, Tulagi and adjacent positions. Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, to be in charge. Target date 1st August 1942.
  2. Seize and occupy the rest of the Solomon Islands, Lae, Salamaua, and Papua. MacArthur to be in overall command.
  3. Seize and occupy Rabaul and adjacent positions in New Guinea and New Ireland. MacArthur to be in overall command.

(iii) *Other important clauses*:

Direct command of tactical operations to remain with the naval task force commander throughout all three tasks; the Joint Chiefs of Staff to retain the right to withdraw naval attached units after the completion of any one task for use elsewhere, if in their judgement desirable; the boundary between S.W.P.A. (MacArthur) and the Pacific Area (Nimitz) to be shifted westward to the longitude 159 degrees East from 1st August 1942, to include Guadalcanal in the Pacific Area.

In the event, some of the tasks listed above were never carried out as then intended. Circumstances enabled the ultimate objective—the winning of the war—to be achieved without the cost in human life and the materials of war that invasion of all the designated areas would have entailed. But the operation for the seizure of Tulagi, and of Guadalcanal and the potential Japanese airstrip, was carried out, though neither General MacArthur nor Admiral Ghormley (who met in Melbourne early in July to discuss the impending operation) liked either it or the proposed target date of 1st August. In a protest to King and Nimitz on 8th-9th July, they urged that WATCHTOWER be deferred until adequate means were available for a quick seizure and rapid follow-up, in view of the recently developed enemy airfields, and the shortage of Allied aircraft, airfields, transports, and troops.

These protests caused King, in a letter to Marshall on 10th July, to observe:

Three weeks ago MacArthur stated that, if he could be furnished amphibious forces and two carriers, he could push right through to Rabaul. . . . He now feels that he not only cannot undertake this extended operation but not even the Tulagi operation.

That same day King wrote to MacArthur saying that WATCHTOWER must not be delayed, even if the follow up were postponed. A Japanese airfield on Guadalcanal would be too serious a threat to the United States-Australia communications. In accepting the responsibility for ordering WATCHTOWER

at this juncture, said the U.S. naval historian,<sup>5</sup> Admiral King “made one of the great decisions of the war”. Preparations for the operation were put in hand at once.

### III

Meanwhile, with the arrival of the Allied troops and engineers at Milne Bay, work began at once on the site clearing and construction of an airstrip (to be Milne Bay's No. 1 Strip) some three miles west of the improvised docks. When, on 11th July, Brigadier Field<sup>6</sup> arrived in Milne Bay to command “Milne Force”, with advanced elements of his 7th Brigade Group in the Dutch ship *Tasman* (4,492 tons) escorted by *Warrego*, the construction of No. 1 Strip was well advanced. Within a few days of his arrival a site for a second strip (No. 2) was decided on at Waigani, some eight miles due west of the docks. By the end of the month Field had planned a third (No. 3) strip, a mile north-eastward of the dock and running north-westward from the water's edge on the west side of Swinger Bay. By early August, when work on No. 3 Strip was started, the Allied forces at Milne Bay comprised 8,600 Australian combat troops, supported by two R.A.A.F. Kittyhawk fighter squadrons, with 1,300 American troops, mainly engineers constructing the airstrip.

In this race for strategically placed airfields, the Allies were at this stage ahead of the Japanese at the southern end of the island chain. The enemy occupied the Lunga area of Guadalcanal with a contingent from the Tulagi garrison on 8th June. A survey group selected a site for an airstrip two miles south-east of Lunga Point. Work on its construction began in mid-July by 2,571 men of the *11th* and *13th Construction Units*. A force of about 400 men of the *81st* and *84th Garrison Units* was organised to defend the area. Simultaneously men of the *14th Construction Unit* were at work improving an emergency airstrip, adequate for medium bombers, at Buka. The opinion of the staff officers of the *8th Base Force* at Rabaul was that when the bases at Buka and Guadalcanal were finished, the air defence of the Solomons would be complete.

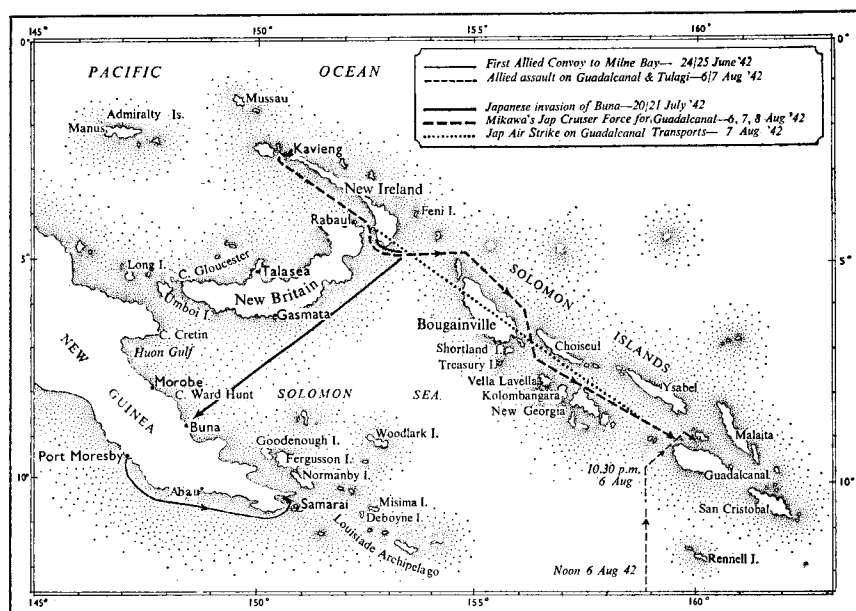
But though the enemy lagged behind in their development of Guadalcanal as against the Allies at Milne Bay, they stole a march westward of Milne Bay. On 15th July General MacArthur issued a directive to Brigadier-General Robert H. Van Volkenburgh, U.S. Army, commander designate of “Buna Force”, to prepare and defend an aerodrome in the Buna area, 175 miles north-west of New Guinea's eastern tip at East Cape, and 85 miles north-east of Port Moresby, from which it lies diametrically across the land with its lofty spinal barrier of the Owen Stanley mountain range. The plan allowed for the seizure of the area by a light force crossing overland from Moresby, and the transport of advanced parties to the main force—and later of the main force itself—by sea. Protection along the north-east coast of New Guinea would be provided by Milne

<sup>5</sup> Morison, Vol IV, pp. 259-63, whence much of the above account is derived.

<sup>6</sup> Brig J. Field, CBE, DSO, ED. Comd 2/12 Bn 1939-42, 7 Bde 1942-45. University lecturer and mechanical engineer; of Hobart; b. Castlemaine, Vic, 10 Apr 1899.

Bay. The essence of the plan was to take possession of the area, provide immediate anti-aircraft defences, and unload supplies prior to discovery.

Unfortunately the Japanese had similar ideas regarding Buna. They were aware of the Allied activities at Milne Bay, where they carried out their first air reconnaissance on 11th July. But their immediate interest was in Buna, thence to carry out the invasion of Port Moresby by an overland operation, supplemented by another advance by sea.



Moves in Solomons-New Guinea area, June-August 1942

It will be recalled that, subsequent to the check to Japanese plans by the Coral Sea Battle, General Hyakutake, commander of the *XVII Army*, was directed on 18th May to attack New Caledonia, Fiji and Samoa, and to continue the attack on Port Moresby by land across New Guinea. Naval losses at Midway deprived the Japanese of the naval-air strength to carry out the New Caledonia, Fiji and Samoa part of this plan, but the Port Moresby part remained. Another part of the plan remained in the form of the *Eighth Fleet*, which was originally intended as a local defence force for Fiji, Samoa and New Caledonia after their occupation. Under the new arrangement the interests and activities of the *XVII Army* were to be concentrated on the invasion of Port Moresby. A central army-navy agreement placed responsibility for the defence of the Solomons upon the *Eighth Fleet*.

The Japanese invasion in the Gona-Buna area took place on 21st-22nd July. The invasion force in three transports, escorted by the *18th Cruiser Squadron* (*Tatsuta, Tenryu*), destroyers and submarine chasers, left Rabaul

on 20th July. At 5.30 p.m. on the 21st, naval landing forces went on shore at Giruwa, three miles north-west of Buna, and at 7 p.m. army forces began landing at Basabua, five miles farther west. Naval forces occupied Buna, without opposition, on the 22nd. That day an Allied air attack on Japanese ships in the Buna anchorage damaged the transport *Ayatosan Maru* (9,788 tons) and destroyer *Uzuki*, and both ships returned to Rabaul escorted by the destroyer *Yuzuki*. The remainder of the invasion force—the cruisers, minelayer *Tsugaru*, transport *Ryoyo Maru* (5,974 tons), destroyer *Asanagi*, and the submarine chasers, left Buna and reached Rabaul on 24th July.<sup>7</sup> There were follow-up landings at Buna on 26th July by small army reinforcements in the destroyer *Yunagi*, and on the 29th-30th by a larger army force in transports *Ryoyo Maru* and *Kotoku Maru* (6,701 tons), escorted by *Tatsuta* and *Yuzuki*. In Allied air attacks on 29th-30th July, *Kotoku Maru* was hit and had to be abandoned.

On 30th July Vice-Admiral Mikawa arrived at Rabaul, and hoisted his flag on shore in a ramshackle building “far inferior to those of the lesser headquarters of the *8th Base Force*”.<sup>8</sup> Mikawa, described by one of his staff officers as “a gentle, soft-spoken man and an intelligent naval officer of broad experience, judgment and courage”, in his own words “recognised the mobile capability of U.S. carrier task forces”, and accordingly decided to station *Chokai* and the *6th Cruiser Division* in the safer rear base of Kavieng, while he himself commanded local operations from on shore at Rabaul. His own capabilities were circumscribed in that his command extended only to sea and land operations in the area. Air operations were entirely outside his responsibility and control. In discussions with *XVII Army* it was decided that a coastal route to Port Moresby must be opened as soon as possible, since it would be impossible to maintain the necessary flow of supplies and heavy weapons, over the Owen Stanley range. Plans were accordingly made for the seaborne invasion of Port Moresby by mid-August, with the invasion of Milne Bay as a preliminary operation.

#### IV

Simultaneously, away in the south, the Allies were hastening preparations for the invasion of Tulagi and Guadalcanal. On 10th July Vice-Admiral Ghormley received Admiral Nimitz's operational orders for the seizure of Tulagi, Guadalcanal, and Ndeni in the Santa Cruz group, about 250 miles north of Espiritu Santo. (In the event the Santa Cruz Islands were never occupied in strength “because they proved to be forbiddingly malarial and rugged”.) With the operation order, Ghormley received a list of available ground and air forces and ships. They included assault forces of some 16,000 American marines; about 670 aircraft of all types; 48 combat ships;

<sup>7</sup> “Eastern New Guinea Invasion Operations”—Japanese Monograph No. 96. (Later evidence, including the locating of the wreck of *Ayatosan Maru* off Gona some months later and her inclusion in *Japanese Naval and Merchant Shipping Losses During World War II* (prepared by the Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee, 1947), p. 32, as having been sunk on 22nd July 1942, would appear to make the Monograph No. 96 report on her in error in this particular.

<sup>8</sup> Toshikazu Ohmae, “The Battle of Savo Island”, *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, Vol. 83, No. 12, December 1957, pp. 1263-78.

and 28 auxiliaries. American, Australian, and New Zealand forces were among them in one form or another. Of the aircraft, 240 were carrier-based in the air groups of U.S. Ships *Saratoga*, *Enterprise*, and *Wasp*; around 300 of Vice-Admiral J. S. McCain's South Pacific Force were land-based, variously distributed at Efate, New Caledonia, Fiji, Tongatapu, and Samoa; the balance were land-based aircraft of MacArthur's South-West Pacific Force, operating under the command of General George C. Kenney, U.S.A., and his area commanders Air Commodore F. W. F. Lukis, R.A.A.F., and Brigadier-General Scanlon, U.S.A., and based in north-east Australia and Port Moresby. The ships designated for the operation were the carriers *Saratoga*, *Enterprise*, and *Wasp* of the Air Support Force with its covering groups comprising the new battleship *North Carolina*, and the heavy cruisers *Minneapolis*, *New Orleans*, *Portland*, *San Francisco* and *Salt Lake City*, and the anti-aircraft light cruiser *Atlanta*, with 16 screening destroyers; the escort to the Amphibious Force, H.M.A. Ships *Australia*, *Canberra*, and *Hobart*, and U.S.S. *Chicago*, with nine screening destroyers; the Fire Support Groups, heavy cruisers *Vincennes*, *Quincy*, *Astoria*, and the anti-aircraft light cruiser *San Juan*,<sup>9</sup> and six destroyers; and the Amphibious Force of 13 transports, six store ships, and four converted destroyer fast transports. There were also six American "S" class submarines from the force based on Brisbane under Captain R. W. Christie, U.S.N.<sup>1</sup> These prowled off Rabaul, while another group from the Pacific Fleet kept watch on the Japanese base at Truk.

The over-all commander was Admiral Ghormley, in his flagship *Argonne*<sup>2</sup> at Noumea. The officer in tactical command was Admiral Fletcher, in U.S.S. *Saratoga*. Rear-Admiral Richmond K. Turner, U.S.N., commanded the Amphibious Force and the embarked Marines. In practice, Fletcher limited his command to the three carrier groups, and Turner had complete autonomy from the moment of sailing. His second-in-command, and commander of Task Force 44 (which in this operation became Task Group 62.6, the escort to the Amphibious Force) and of the Fire Support Groups, was Rear-Admiral Crutchley, R.N., commanding the Australian Squadron, flying his flag in H.M.A.S. *Australia*. Major-General A. A. Vandegrift commanded the Marines on shore.

The expeditionary force was formed with the meeting of the various components from Noumea, New Zealand, Australia, and other Pacific departure points. The *Wasp* carrier group, for example, sailed from San Diego on 1st July escorting six combat-loaded transports carrying the third echelon of Marines. Time did not allow of tactical exercises to any extent. It was America's first amphibious operation since 1898. Few of the ships had ever operated together before. Crutchley did not even have

<sup>9</sup> *Atlanta* and *San Juan*, US light cruisers (1941), 6,000 tons, twelve 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 32 kts. *Atlanta* sunk off Lunga Point, Guadalcanal, 13 Nov 1942.

<sup>1</sup> There were at this time 11 US submarines based on Brisbane, and 19 (under Rear-Admiral C. A. Lockwood, USN), based on Fremantle, WA. On 1st August 5 and 11 submarines respectively were on patrol.

<sup>2</sup> *Argonne*, US fleet auxiliary (conv. 1940), 8,400 tons.

the chance to meet the captains of the U.S. cruisers hurriedly placed under his command. There was no time for operation orders to be prepared, distributed and studied, before the ships taking part had sailed to carry out the landing rehearsal and the actual operation. In all of these important factors the expedition was at a decided disadvantage.

There were various preliminaries. Early in June it was apparent to the D.N.I., Long, in Melbourne, that the American build-up in the South Pacific presaged offensive operations there. Lieut-Commander H. A. MacKenzie, who had been Naval Intelligence Officer at Rabaul, was appointed Deputy Supervising Intelligence Officer at Noumea, there to receive, interpret, and disseminate to South Pacific headquarters information about the islands, and Intelligence received from the coastwatchers there. The coastwatchers' Intelligence contributed—with information and photographs from air force sources—towards the maps of Lunga, Tulagi, and Gavutu, giving the positions of Japanese guns, defence works, and other installations, together with information including the approximate numbers of enemy troops at each, which Australian Naval Intelligence at Townsville, under Commander Feldt's direction as Supervising Intelligence Officer, North Eastern Area, was able to supply to the American Marines before the operation. The coastwatchers included a number strategically placed behind the Japanese lines in the Solomons—Lieutenant Read, R.A.N.V.R., in northern Bougainville; Lieutenant Mason,<sup>3</sup> R.A.N.V.R., in the south of that island; Lieutenant Macfarlan on Guadalcanal, where at the west end was also Sub-Lieutenant Rhoades<sup>4</sup> and at the east end District Officer Martin Clemens,<sup>5</sup> among others. Another District Officer, Kennedy, was on Ysabel Island, north of Guadalcanal. Some of these, Read and Mason in particular, were nourished by means of "drops" from Allied aircraft at intervals. Earlier in the year, the civil administration in the British Solomons was turned into a military administration. All civil servants were commissioned into the British Solomon Islands Protectorate Defence Force—the District Officers as captains—under the command of the Resident Commissioner, Marchant<sup>6</sup> with the rank of lieutenant-colonel and with his headquarters on Malaita.

The interest of the Japanese in Guadalcanal was reported by the coastwatchers from June onwards, and their observations were confirmed by aerial reconnaissance. Meanwhile the Japanese were aware of the presence of these enemies in their midst and made sporadic attempts to capture them, and even took dogs to Bougainville as an aid—five warships arrived off Kieta on 3rd July, and an occupation force, with dogs, landed. But

<sup>3</sup> Lt P. E. Mason, DSC, RANVR. Coastwatcher, AIB. Plantation manager; of Bougainville; b. Sydney, 30 Apr 1901.

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Cdr F. A. Rhoades, RANVR. (1st AIF: Tpr 1st LH Regt.) Coastwatcher, AIB. Plantation manager; of Guadalcanal; b. North Sydney, 26 Jun 1895.

<sup>5</sup> Capt W. F. M. Clemens, MC. Coastwatcher; British Solomon Is Protectorate Defence Force 1939-45. District Officer; of Guadalcanal; b. Aberdeen, Scotland, 17 Apr 1915.

<sup>6</sup> Lt-Col W. S. Marchant, CMG, OBE; BSIP Defence Force. Resident Commissioner, British Solomon Is Protectorate 1939-43; Chief Native Commissioner Kenya Colony 1943-47. B. 10 Dec 1894. Died 1 Feb 1953.



the general loyalty of the natives, and the skill, care, and courage of the coastwatchers, defeated these attempts, though there were some close shaves.<sup>7</sup>

Because of the limit of teleradio range attainable by the amateur coast-watcher operators, routine communication in the Solomons was from them to Marchant on Malaita. He had a professional operator who was able to transmit to and receive signals from the 700 miles distant Vila, Efate. Marchant re-coded the coastwatchers' messages in high grade code, and sent them to the Naval Intelligence Officer at Vila, whence they were re-transmitted to the South Pacific command. When transmission to Vila was difficult, Vanikoro Island, 300 miles from Malaita in the Santa Cruz group, provided the link with a radio there operated by Mrs Ruby Boye, wife of the manager of a timber company.<sup>8</sup>

On 9th July Marchant passed on the information that the Japanese were consolidating on Guadalcanal and were clearing a coconut grove to construct an airfield. Macfarlan was instructed to conduct a ground reconnaissance of the position there. He went through the mountains at the back of Lunga and reached a point about a mile from the control room in the centre of the airfield, whence he had a good view of the proceedings, watched the evening parade, and under cover of darkness made back for his camp. On the way he slipped and broke a bone in his right ankle, and had to be carried for several miles by his natives. He reached the camp safely and teleradioed his information. On Malaita, Marchant was instructed to send weather reports daily, and these assisted in making a forecast some days ahead of D-day. On Bougainville, to make certain that they were available when the Allied assault took place, Read and Mason were instructed to move inland clear of any danger, and to preserve radio silence until instructed to resume reporting. Not until 5th August were they directed to resume their lookout positions—Read at Pora Pora, overlooking Buka Passage, and Mason on Malabita Hill above Buin, whence he had an unrivalled view of the whole area enclosed by the Shortland Islands, Fauro Island, and Bougainville. From the two observation posts their occupants would visually cover the air routes from Kavieng to Guadalcanal, and from Rabaul to Guadalcanal, and be able to pass good notice of any south-bound attacking aircraft. They would, too, have under observation the likely anchorages of any surface forces used in a Japanese counter-attack.

<sup>7</sup> Macfarlan, on Guadalcanal, later reported: "During the period that my camp was established at Gold Ridge, which was almost continuous from the middle of March until the 9th July . . . only two real attempts were made by the enemy to capture us, despite the fact that they were quite well aware of my position, who I was, and of the fact that I was operating an observation post with teleradio communication. Invariably patrols would proceed along the Balasuna River until the going got hard, that is, through thick scrub and scrubby steep rises in the mountains with occasional descents into gorges and up again on the other side. In view of their reluctance to negotiate this type of country, I concluded that they were either physically incapable of doing so, or they were afraid of ambush by the bush natives." Macfarlan eventually decided to shift from Gold Ridge to another lookout post after his eyrie there was machine-gunned by two Zero float-planes on 9th July. (Report of Paymaster Lieutenant D. S. Macfarlan, RANVR 1942.)

<sup>8</sup> She was later appointed Honorary Third Officer WRANS, and was awarded the British Empire Medal.

To ensure the prompt receipt of any warning messages transmitted by them, Read and Mason were instructed to pass aircraft reports in plain language, and the American command was told the frequency on which these reports would be made. And, to make certain that transmission channels would exist, in addition to direct signals from Read and Mason to the American forces, it was arranged that Marchant would pass the messages from Malaita to Vila whence they would be relayed on by the Naval Intelligence Officer there; and an alternative channel through Port Moresby, Townsville and Canberra, would pass the warnings to Pearl Harbour, whence a powerful transmitter would broadcast them to the Pacific.

## V

On 7th July Task Force 44, which had been based on Brisbane for two months, received advice that it would be cooperating in certain offensive operations about 1st August. It had been strengthened by the addition of H.M.A.S. *Canberra* (which had been refitting in Sydney), U.S.S. *Salt Lake City*, and the American 4th Destroyer Squadron, U.S. Ships *Selfridge*, *Henley*, *Mugford*, *Blue*, *Helm*, *Patterson*, *Ralph Talbot*, *Jarvis*, and *Bagley*.<sup>9</sup> During the period, radar was fitted in a number of ships, and—partly to conform with the American ships, but chiefly because experience at sea had shown that camouflage was of little use—the Australian ships were painted dark matt sea grey.

On 14th July Task Force 44, comprising *Australia* (Captain H. B. Farncomb, flag of Rear-Admiral Crutchley), *Canberra* (Captain F. E. Getting<sup>1</sup>), *Hobart* (Captain H. A. Showers<sup>2</sup>), *Salt Lake City*, *Chicago*, and destroyers *Patterson*, *Ralph Talbot*, and *Jarvis*, left Brisbane to rendezvous with Admiral Turner's Amphibious Force (comprising eight transports and four cargo ships, with escort) which it did at Wellington on the 19th. Other destroyers of the force which were not in Brisbane at the time of sailing joined at Wellington. On 22nd July the combined forces sailed from the New Zealand port, and on the 26th, about 300 miles south of Fiji, met Task Force 61 (*Saratoga*, *Enterprise*, *Wasp*, *North Carolina*, cruisers and destroyers, and five transports and the four fast destroyer transports). *Salt Lake City* detached from Task Force 44 to join *Wasp*'s covering group. The whole force, with the carrier groups providing distant cover, then proceeded to the vicinity of the Fiji Islands where, from 28th to 31st July inclusive, the amphibious and screening forces carried out landing rehearsals on Koro Island. Ships were fuelled, final operation orders were issued, and a conference of group commanders of the Allied Force was

<sup>9</sup> *Blue*, *Helm*, *Patterson*, *Ralph Talbot*, *Jarvis* and *Bagley*, US destroyers (1937), 1,500 tons, four 5-in guns, sixteen 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. *Blue* sunk off Guadalcanal, 23 Aug 1942; *Jarvis* sunk off Guadalcanal, 9 Aug 1942.

<sup>1</sup> Captain Getting, who succeeded Burnett as Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff in May 1941 when Burnett was appointed in command of *Sydney*, assumed command of *Canberra* vice Captain Moore, on 17th June 1942. He was succeeded as Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff by Captain R. F. Nichols, RN.

<sup>2</sup> Captain Showers assumed command of *Hobart* (from *Adelaide*) on 8th June 1942, vice Captain H. L. Howden.

held in *Australia*, where Rear-Admiral Turner and General Vandegrift outlined plans and landing schedules.

Rear-Admiral Crutchley was nominated commander of the screening group responsible for the safe arrival in the combat area of the troop and cargo ships, and for their support there against all forms of enemy attack. He was also nominated second-in-command of the Attack Force, in charge of the withdrawal of the troop and cargo ships from the combat area when they were emptied.

The amphibious force and screening force sailed from Koro Island at 5.30 p.m. on 31st July and, south of the Fiji Islands at 5 p.m. next day, met the three carrier groups, which provided reconnaissance and patrols during the voyage to the scene of operations. Noon position on Sunday, 2nd August, was some 250 miles east of the southernmost of the New Hebrides. Vice-Admiral Ghormley assumed operational command of the U.S. Army Forces in the South Pacific, and the dividing line between the South Pacific and South-West Pacific was moved one degree westward, to 159 degrees East. The expedition steamed north-westward up between the New Hebrides and Loyalty Islands. There was no indication that they had been sighted by enemy reconnaissance, though Intelligence that the Japanese were moving additional air strength towards Rabaul from the Mandates suggested that the enemy might be aware of the impending attack. From 4th August onwards Crutchley maintained radar guard for the detection of enemy reconnaissance aircraft.

At noon on 5th August, with less than two days to go, the ships were about 400 miles S. by W. of Guadalcanal. The weather was favouring the invaders, with much cumulus cloud and a surface haze which, on 6th August, as the expedition approached its objective, deepened into heavy overcast and a damp mist which closely limited surface visibility. At noon the assault groups were about 60 miles west of Rennell Island, which is 130 miles due south of Guadalcanal, and were steering north with the escorts at first degree of surface and anti-aircraft readiness. The carrier groups had proceeded to their own covering positions south of Guadalcanal.

At 4.15 p.m. on the 6th the assault forces assumed approach positions. Squadron "Y", comprising the four ex-destroyer transports and four merchant transports which would make the landings in the Tulagi area, was in the van, led by U.S.S. *San Juan* with *Chicago* and H.M.A.S. *Canberra* as additional escorts, and six destroyers and five minesweepers. Six miles astern, *Australia* led the Guadalcanal landing force of Squadron "X", of nine transports and six store ships, with H.M.A.S. *Hobart* and U.S. Ships *Vincennes*, *Quincy*, *Astoria*, and nine destroyers. At 10.30 p.m. Squadron "Y" altered course to N.E. towards the north-west end of Guadalcanal, with Squadron "X" following suit half an hour later. Through the darkness the two groups stole quietly over a smooth sea until the waning moon, rising just before 2.30 in the morning of Friday, 7th August, climbed to reveal a shadowy Savo Island and the western end of Guadalcanal. The groups' ways parted. Squadron "Y" stood on north-eastward to pass to the

northward of Savo, and Squadron "X" hauled round to the south-eastward for the disembarkation area off Guadalcanal's north shore. Except for the approaching ships the sea was empty and silent; and the dimly apprehended moon-bathed shores were unrevealing and unresponsive.

## VI

Meanwhile, others of the strategical strings manipulated by the Allied naval commands and affecting naval forces in connection with this operation, were drawing ships eastward across the Indian Ocean. Towards the end of July, Admiral King asked the Admiralty for a diversion by the Eastern Fleet early in August to help the offensive in the Solomons. The result was operation STAB, carried out by Admiral Somerville in the Bay of Bengal. Force "A" of the Eastern Fleet, comprising *Warspite*, *Illustrious*, *Formidable*, cruisers, and destroyers including the Australian ships *Napier* (D.7), *Norman* and *Nizam*, reached Colombo at the end of July. Sufficient merchant ships were assembled to form three dummy convoys, and from 1st August these were sailed from Colombo and the east coast of India to simulate an expedition against the Andaman Islands.

Operation STAB was, seemingly, a substitute for a more ambitious project. On 3rd June General Blamey suggested to General MacArthur that two courses of action were open regarding Timor: the recapture of the island with an overseas expedition; or the withdrawal thence of the bulk of the Allied forces then engaged in guerilla warfare against the Japanese. MacArthur replied that a number of requisites for the formation of an adequate overseas expedition were lacking: "Without them such an expedition has little chance of success and cannot therefore be considered with the means now available."

Apparently, however, the matter was canvassed elsewhere. MacArthur's reply to Blamey was on 11th June. A few days later Admiral King in Washington signalled to Admiral Leary in Melbourne:

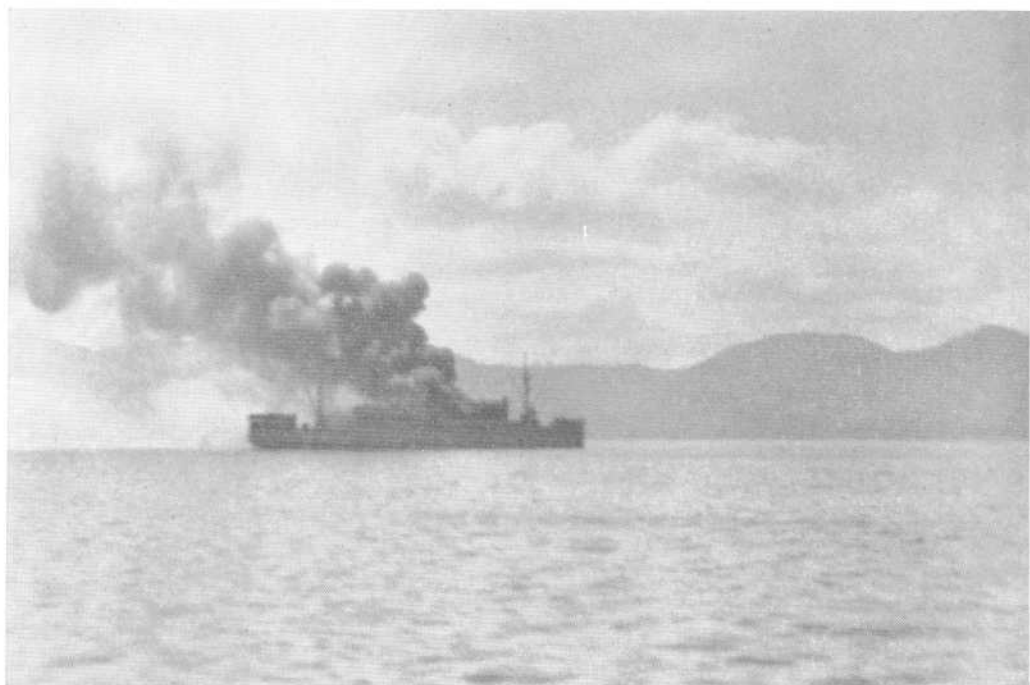
Agreement expected with British for minimum of two carriers from Eastern Fleet for seizure of Timor or other suitable place with provision that detachment be used conjointly with air land-based in north-west Australia. To be timed with this will be seizure of Tulagi by Sopac Forces, including U.S. Task Force of minimum of two carriers likewise to be used with air land-based in north-east Australia, New Hebrides and New Caledonia. Target date is 1st August.

Discussing operation STAB, and probably referring to the above-mentioned suggestion, the British naval historian says:

The Admiralty was anxious to help contain Japanese air and surface forces, but found it difficult to devise an effective way of doing so. They did not consider that hit-and-run raids on the Andaman Islands or on northern Sumatra would deceive the enemy, and they were determined not to run the risk of exposing a fleet, whose fighter defences were bound to be very thin, to attack by shore-based aircraft.<sup>3</sup>

There were indications that the Japanese moved bomber reinforcements to northern Sumatra about this time, and there were reports of Japanese

<sup>3</sup> Roskill, Vol II, pp. 222-3.



(Leading Steward R. G. Wastell)

The motor vessel *Macdhui* on fire after air attack. Port Moresby, 18th June 1942.



(Australian War Memorial)

H.M.A.S. *Warrego* at Port Moresby, September 1942.



*(Australian War Memorial)*

Nursing sisters of the R.A.N.



*(R.A.N. Historical Section)*

A group of W.R.A.N.S.



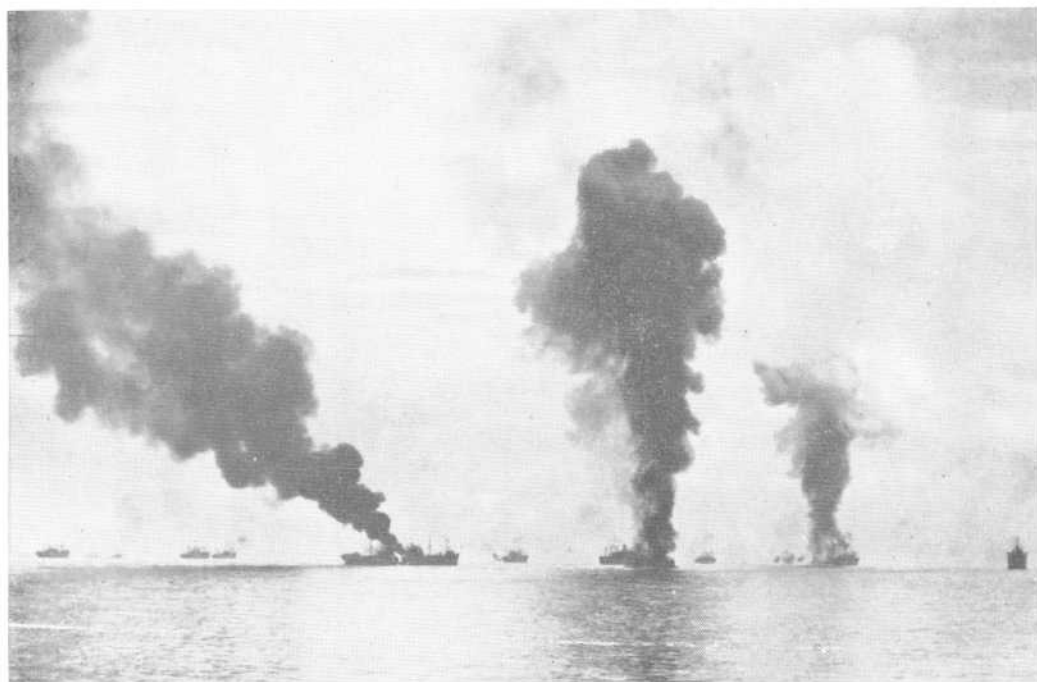
*(From portrait by Esther Paterson)*

Rear-Admiral V. A. C. Crutchley, V.C., Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron.



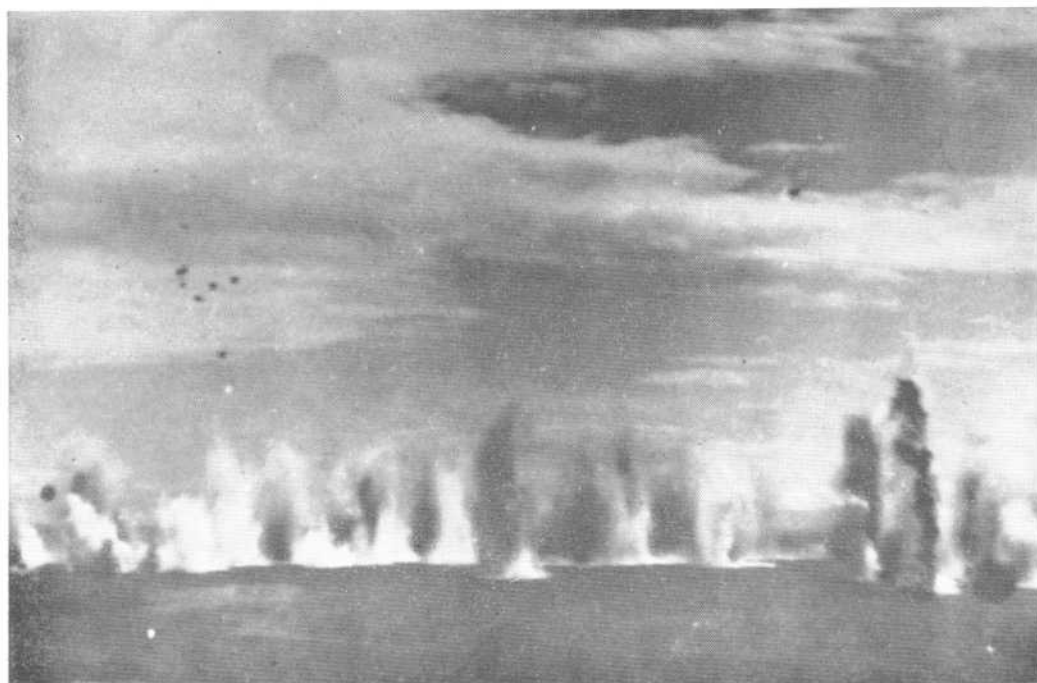
*(R.A.N. Historical Section)*

First Officer S. M. McClellans, Director of W.R.A.N.S.,  
November 1944.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

American shipping on fire after a Japanese bombing attack, Guadalcanal, 8th August 1942.



*(Yeoman of Signals A. J. Taylor, R.A.N.)*

A Japanese bombing attack at Guadalcanal, 8th August 1942.



surface movements in the Malay area; but it is doubtful if any substantial forces were transferred in the direction of the Indian Ocean. Force "A" returned to Colombo on 4th August, and on that day the 4th Cruiser Squadron, with part of Force "A"—*Formidable*, *Nizam* and *Norman*—sailed for Kilindini to prepare for operations against Madagascar. The remainder of Force "A"—*Warspite* and *Illustrious*, with five destroyers including *Napier*—sailed westward from Colombo on 10th August, but Admiral Somerville arranged for a radio diversion giving the impression that Force "A" was still operating in the Bay of Bengal until 18th August.<sup>4</sup>

(While the three Australian "N" Class destroyers of the 7th Flotilla were thus engaged in the eastern Indian Ocean, *Nepal*,<sup>5</sup> another of the class, and the last to commission (29th May 1942) for the R.A.N., was on her way out from England to join the flotilla. On 3rd August *Nepal* (Commander Morris<sup>6</sup>) was in the Atlantic as part of the anti-submarine escort of one of the "Winston's Special" convoys—21P. At 2 p.m., when on the equator in the Gulf of Guinea, she started a series of depth-charge attacks on a submarine. The hunt continued for an hour and a half, but without decisive result. She joined the Eastern Fleet in time to take part in the Madagascar operation in September.)

## VII

Away some 500 miles north-westward in Rabaul, faint echoes were heard of happenings at the southern end of the island chain. Increasingly the distant rumbles of Allied bomb explosions on Guadalcanal were brought home to Japan's *Eighth Fleet* in reports from the southern island's garrison. On the last day of July seven American Flying Fortress bombers attacked Guadalcanal; ten struck on 1st August and eleven the next day; two on the 3rd, nine on the 4th, and five on 5th August. Increased radio communication between the Allies in the South Pacific was also apparent, and on 5th August *Eighth Fleet* received from Imperial General Headquarters the suggestion, based on a report from Radio Intelligence, that active enemy operations might be in train in the south seas. But *Eighth Fleet* thought otherwise, and, remembering the trans-montane raids from the American carriers in March when they struck at Lae and Salamaua, concluded that any enemy thrust would be in Papua against the Japanese bridgehead at Buna and the forces creeping south over the Owen Stanleys. It was considered that the increased air raids on Guadalcanal were diversionary.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The Japanese did reinforce the Andaman area at the end of July. In conjunction with reinforcements by the army, the navy stationed the 8th *Kure Special Naval Landing Force* on Car Nicobar Island, one air defence unit and coast artillery unit at Port Blair, and one unit of coast artillery at Sabang. "Japanese Studies in World War II, No. 29. Naval Operations in the Southern Area, 1942-45." An ATIS Document 851/1-29. AL1082.

<sup>5</sup> HMAS *Nepal*, destroyer (1942), 1,690 tons, six 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 36 kts.

<sup>6</sup> Capt F. B. Morris, OBE; RAN. Squadron (N) Officer, HMAS *Canberra*, 1939-41; Comd HMAS *Nepal* 1942-44, HMAS *Ballarat* and Senior Officer 21st MS Flotilla 1944-45; NOIC New Guinea 1945. B. Wycheproof, Vic, 22 May 1902.

<sup>7</sup> Ohmae, "The Battle of Savo Island", p. 1267.

Plans were pressed forward for the overland drive to Port Moresby, and for the invasion of Milne Bay. On 31st July a Buna convoy—minelayer *Tsugaru*, transport *Nankai Maru* (8,416 tons), and a submarine chaser—was attacked by Allied aircraft and denied entrance to Buna anchorage. On 4th August Milne Bay suffered its first air raid, when five Zero fighters carried out a gunfire attack on Gili Gili. The Japanese intended to run a big convoy to Buna, carrying the main body of the *Nankai Detachment*, to arrive there on 8th August. They believed that the Allies would make every effort to intercept, and as an insurance against this planned a heavy air raid on Milne Bay in the early morning of 7th August. The Buna convoy—*Nankai Maru*, *Kinai Maru* (8,360 tons) and *Kenyo Maru* (6,470), escorted by *Tatsuta*, *Yuzuki*, *Uzuki*, and submarine chasers sailed from Rabaul on 6th August. Japanese air searches to the south reported no enemy activity south of Guadalcanal, and the day passed quietly. But next dawn, before the projected air attack on Milne Bay could take place, came plan-changing news from the south in an urgent signal which led to the cancellation of the Milne Bay raid and the recall of the Buna convoy: "0430. Tulagi being heavily bombarded from air and sea. Enemy carrier task force sighted." Successive messages indicated a serious turn. Rabaul lost contact with Japanese forces on Guadalcanal after a message saying that they had encountered American landing forces and were retreating into the jungle hills. Fateful news from the Tulagi garrison reached Rabaul at 6.5 a.m. "The enemy force is overwhelming. We will defend our positions to the death." The day of destiny had dawned in the Pacific.

### VIII

There was "hard lying" in the Australian cruisers of the Tulagi and Guadalcanal attack forces as they steamed towards their objectives through the night of 6th-7th August 1942. Ships' companies slept on the decks, in the turrets and in the control positions, at their stations in first degree of readiness in the earlier stages of the night. In *Australia*, the bugle sang its call to "action stations" at 2.45 a.m. on the 7th.

The sailors rise stiffly from their rest and collect their odds and ends; steel helmets, Mae Wests.<sup>8</sup> We eagerly suck up a mug of boiling cocoa, turning the bottoms up sky high to get the last sweet drop, and we can see the land now, black and menacing<sup>9</sup> on our starboard bow. . . . It is amusing to hear the bridge personnel discussing events in a low whisper, presumably in order that the enemy shall not be aware of our presence. But he is still some twenty miles distant.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Mae Wests" were the life-jackets which gave the wearers something of a pouter pigeon appearance. They were so called after a voluptuously curved actress of the period.

<sup>9</sup> There were those present who felt an oppression of the spirit engendered by the location. "There is something sinister and depressing about that sound between Guadalcanal and Florida Islands, from which the serrated cone of Savo Island thrusts up like the crest of a giant dinosaur emerging from the ocean depths. It is now hard to dissociate this feeling from events and from the remembrance of those who there met death in its most horrible forms. Yet there is that which eludes analysis. . . . Men who rounded Cape Esperance in the darkness before dawn of 7 August insist that even then they felt an oppression of the spirit—"It gave you creeps'." Morison, Vol IV, pp. 282-3.

<sup>1</sup> "The First Day", by C. H. Nichols, Signal Boatwain, HMAS *Australia*, in *H.M.A.S. Mk. II*, p. 152.

The Japanese were taken completely by surprise. No outlying scouts were met to give the alarm. Whatever hope had inspired him who christened that northernmost point of Guadalcanal "Esperance", hope was certainly justified as the ships of Squadron X steamed in the darkness, unchallenged and unmolested, through the seven-mile passage separating the cape of that name from the dead, jungle-covered volcanic cone of Savo Island to the northward. Here was deep, open water in the approaches to the sound, both south and north of Savo. The shoal water was farther eastward, between Florida and Guadalcanal, and in and around the Tulagi disembarkation area. The shoals linking Florida and Guadalcanal, threaded by Nggela, Sealark, and Lengo Channels, afforded some protection to the two disembarkation areas against surface attack from the eastward. Several of the cruisers carried navigational insurance in the persons of merchant service masters familiar with these waters through long association, who had volunteered their services as advisers, and pilots if necessary. Captain William Wilding, of Burns Philp and Company, was in H.M.A.S. *Australia*, and others were in some of the American cruisers.

The overcast had melted away, and the clear sky was luminous with stars. The sea was smooth. The south-easterly wind was a zephyr. Dawn came with the suddenness of the latitude, and it was not full daylight when the rumble of motors heralded the 6.15 a.m. catapulting of the aircraft of both squadrons' cruisers to carry out continuous anti-submarine air patrols of both entrances to the sound. Before the aircraft were launched, the Japanese on shore were startled to wakefulness and watchfulness by the sounds of gunfire. It had been reported that there were enemy batteries at Kukum, near Lunga Point and the X Group's disembarkation area. *Quincy* was called up from the rear of the formation, with the responsibility of dealing with the enemy guns, and she opened fire at 6.13. At the same time U.S. Ships *Selfridge* and *Dewey*<sup>2</sup> attacked with gunfire a small schooner crossing towards Kukum from the north, and set her heavily on fire. Simultaneously the sky became noisy with the engines of Admiral Fletcher's carrier-borne aircraft sweeping in to their targets, and with the cracking of their gunfire and the bursting of bombs in the Gavutu-Tulagi area and on Guadalcanal. Some 36 fighters and 48 dive bombers were engaged on various missions. Those attacking Gavutu-Tulagi destroyed 18 Japanese seaplanes on the water in their initial sortie.

At 6.23 *Australia* fired three salvos of 8-inch at a beach village between Lunga and Tenaru. The sun rose at 6.33 and revealed the scrub and tree-covered coastline, painted the kunai plains and green ridges, and illuminated the darker jungle-covered mountains lifting some 8,000 feet in the interior. Fourteen minutes later the X Group transports reached their disembarkation area off Lunga Point, 20 miles E.S.E. of Cape Esperance, and a little less than one-third of the distance along Guadalcanal's northern coast. There they remained under way but stopped, outside the 100 fathom

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<sup>2</sup> *Dewey*, US destroyer (1934), 1,345 tons, four 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 36½ kts.

line. Screening groups took up their positions—an outer arc of destroyers, with the cruisers between them and the transports. Thus both cruisers and transports had an anti-submarine screen, and attacking aircraft would have to pass two outer circles of gunfire before reaching the transports. The question of anti-submarine protection weighed heavily with Admiral Crutchley as commander of the screening groups. Reports from 17th July onwards<sup>3</sup> of the presence of Japanese submarines in the Gavutu-Tulagi-Guadalcanal area led him to consider “that this form of enemy attack would be highly probable by day and night”.<sup>4</sup> This influenced screen dispositions, and also led to the commendable precaution of maintaining continuous anti-submarine patrol by the cruisers’ aircraft. The aircraft allocated to the screening groups when in the combat area were: two fighter squadrons (carrier-based and providing fighter protection against air attack, with fighter direction by a carrier team in *Chicago*), and eight cruiser-borne seaplanes. Four of the seaplanes were mostly engaged on liaison work. The remaining four, armed with anti-submarine bombs, kept a continuous anti-submarine patrol over the combat area.

The first landing boats were in the water by 6.53 a.m., and by 8 a.m. the first waves of boats were forming up off the beach between Lunga Point and Tagoma about nine miles east. At 9 a.m. *Quincy*, *Vincennes*, *Astoria*, and *Dewey*, *Hull*,<sup>5</sup> *Ellet* and *Wilson*,<sup>6</sup> which had been bombarding targets along the coast, carried out an intensive bombardment of the landing beaches and vicinity, and a few minutes later the first wave landed on Guadalcanal without opposition. The second wave landed at 9.30, and boats then began a regular ferry service between ships and shore.

Across the sound at Tulagi, the first landing on the south-western side of the small island was a little over an hour earlier than that on Guadalcanal. It followed an intensive bombardment by the Fire Support Group—*San Juan* and destroyers *Monssen* and *Buchanan*<sup>7</sup>—and, like that across the sound, was unopposed. With the first wave at Tulagi there landed, as guides for the Marines, two R.A.N.V.R. officers, Sub-Lieutenants Horton<sup>8</sup> and Josselyn.<sup>9</sup> A third, Waddell,<sup>1</sup> was to have been with them,

<sup>3</sup> 17th July, four small S/Ms off Haleta; 21st July, two small S/Ms Tulagi Harbour; 21st July, mother ship and small S/Ms off Kukum, Guadalcanal; 26th July, 15,000-ton mother ship and three S/Ms off Kukum; on 7th August a periscope was sighted by *San Juan* and destroyers in the Tulagi transport area; and there were reports of enemy submarines proceeding towards the Solomons on 6th, 7th, and 8th August. These reports included one from Cincpac on the 8th: “One division Subron 7 and units Subron 3 en route Florida and Solomon Islands.”

<sup>4</sup> Admiral Crutchley. Explanatory Memorandum, amplifying answers to questions raised by Admiral A. J. Hepburn, U.S.N. (21st February 1943).

<sup>5</sup> *Hull*, US destroyer (1935), 1,395 tons, four 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 36½ kts. Sunk off Luzon, 18 Dec 1944.

<sup>6</sup> *Ellet* and *Wilson*, US destroyers (1939), 1,500 tons, four 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>7</sup> *Monssen* and *Buchanan*, US destroyers (1941-42), 1,630 tons, four 5-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts. *Monssen* sunk off Guadalcanal, 13 Nov 1942.

<sup>8</sup> Lt D. C. Horton, DSC. Coastwatcher, RANVR; RNVR 1943-46. District Officer; of British Solomon Is; b. Calcutta, India, 2 Mar 1915.

<sup>9</sup> Lt-Cdr H. E. Josselyn, DSC. Coastwatcher, RANVR; RNVR 1944-45. District Officer; of British Solomon Is; b. Newark, Nottinghamshire, England, 24 May 1913.

<sup>1</sup> Lt A. N. A. Waddell, DSC. Coastwatcher, RANVR. District Officer; of British Solomon Is; b. Eassie, Scotland, 8 Nov 1913.

but went down with an attack of malaria and was unable to take part.<sup>2</sup> The second wave landed a few minutes after the first.

## IX

The Japanese, away north in Rabaul, kept Zone Nine time, nine hours ahead of Greenwich, while the Allies in the southern Solomons kept Zone Eleven time, eleven hours fast on Greenwich. The two-hour discrepancy exists between Japanese and Allied reports of the happenings of these days of August 1942. Thus the first intimation of the Allied attack: "Tulagi being heavily bombarded from air and sea," was received in Rabaul at 4.30 a.m. on the 7th. The *Eighth Fleet* staff were aroused from sleep, and assembled at headquarters to find a situation that "looked most discouraging". Successive reports did nothing to brighten the prospect, the seriousness of which was brought home with the 8 a.m. Tulagi message "The enemy force is overwhelming," which Rabaul heard at 6.5 a.m. (In order to simplify this account, times mentioned from here on will be brought into line by advancing those in the Japanese reports by two hours.)

The weight of the attack and the forces involved made it apparent to commander *Eighth Fleet* that this was an all-out invasion, and plans to counter it were hastily formulated. The aircraft of the *25th Air Flotilla*, standing by for the intended raid on Milne Bay, were diverted to this new target,<sup>3</sup> and at 9.30 a.m. 27 medium bombers escorted by 17 fighters took off from Rabaul on this mission. Naval surface forces were ordered to make ready for a night attack on the invasion forces. Five submarines of *Squadron 7* were ordered to concentrate for attack on Guadalcanal. The *XVII Army* staff were confident that it would not be difficult to expel the invaders, but, in reply to a suggestion that the *Nankai Detachment* now on its way to Buna be diverted to Guadalcanal, said that this could not be decided at *XVII Army* level. As speed was essential, Commander *Eighth Fleet* hastily organised a reinforcement unit of 310 riflemen with machine-guns, and 100 men of the *5th Sasebo Special Naval Landing Force* and *81st Garrison Unit*. This force embarked in the *Meiyo Maru* (5,628 tons) and headed for Guadalcanal escorted by *Tsugaru* and supply ship *Soya*.

*Eighth Fleet* planners were disturbed at their hurried labours by an air alert at 11.30 a.m.

Enemy daylight attacks were a novelty at this time, and all of us at headquarters rushed outside to see what was happening. There were thirteen American B-17's [Flying Fortresses] flying eastward at about 7,000 metres. We decided that they were making a strike at Vunakanau air base in support of the enemy's operations at Guadalcanal, and therefore we returned to the myriad urgent details of planning that screamed for our attention.

<sup>2</sup> Dick Horton, Henry Josselyn, and Nick Waddell were three young District Officers from the British Solomon Islands Administration. Lieut-Commander Hugh Mackenzie met them in Vila, and on his recommendation, and with the consent of the Resident Commissioner, Marchant, they were commissioned sub-lieutenants R.A.N.V.R., and taken into the Coastwatching Service. All were under 30, and had sound local knowledge of the Solomons.

<sup>3</sup> Naval aircraft at Rabaul under the command of *Eighth Fleet* on 7th August were: 32 medium bombers; 16 dive bombers; and 34 Zero fighters.

The Japanese assumption was correct. The aircraft attacked Vunakanau and later claimed to have shot down seven out of 20 intercepting fighters.

About the same time as the air alert was sounded in Rabaul, the Allied ships at Tulagi and Guadalcanal landing areas heard (11.37 a.m.) the direct voice of coastwatcher Mason in southern Bougainville (who a couple of days earlier had been told cryptically by radio to use as his call sign the first three letters of the surname of his married sister—Mrs. Stokie—and to report aircraft in plain language to save time) giving the preliminary warning of the approach of the Japanese air striking force: "From STO. Twenty-four bombers headed yours." Twenty-five minutes later, having traversed the alternative channel through Port Moresby, Townsville, and Canberra, the warning was heard throughout the Pacific in the far-reaching radio voice of Pearl Harbour. Simultaneously with the receipt of Mason's original warning, Admiral Crutchley received an Intelligence report from South Pacific command that enemy submarines were on the move. This followed depth-charge attacks at 8 a.m. on a submarine in the Tulagi area, repeatedly sighted by *San Juan* and several destroyers.

When Mason's first warning was received the Japanese aircraft were still some 320 miles from their objective, and steps were taken to receive them. The ships prepared for evasive tactics. The carrier-borne fighter aircraft were concentrated for defence under the direction of the fighter direction group in *Chicago*. At 1.15 p.m. the ships heard the "Tally Ho" on the fighter direction voice radio as defending fighters intercepted the enemy aircraft about 15 miles west of Savo Island. Those which got through the fighters' defences, "about eighteen bombers coming over in tight formation and supported by nine Zero fighters" said Captain Farncomb in *Australia's* Report of Proceedings, were engaged by all ships in Squadron X with gunfire at 1.23 p.m. The leader of the enemy formation signalled "bomb release" with a bright light, and a pattern-bombing attack resulted in "all bombs falling to the N.W. of the transports and clear of the screening ships; rather a poor shot". This enemy attack was confined to the Guadalcanal group. Away to the northward, *Henley*, carrying out anti-submarine patrol at the Tulagi landings, recorded in her War Diary: "1.20 p.m. sighted approximately 27 aircraft attacking Squadron X at Guadalcanal. 1.21 air attack being fought off by A/A fire from ships in transport area X. Sighted one enemy plane shot down. 1.23 p.m. sighted bomb explosion in vicinity of area X. No damage visible."

An hour and a half later the Allied forces were again attacked, this time by a force of dive bombers from Rabaul. "At 1500," recorded Farncomb in *Australia*, "ten dive bombers were sighted near Cape Esperance, almost coincidentally with a report on the Fighter Direction of '10 enemy bombers over Guadalcanal'. These attacked and obtained one hit on *Mugford* [it killed 22 men, but did little damage to the vessel] who was the most westerly screening destroyer." This attack cost the Japanese five of their nine dive bombers, lost to carrier-borne fighters and ships' gunfire.

These air attacks, and those of the next day, moved Farncomb to comment, in his report of the operation:

Before the operation started we had heard that the shore-based aircraft from the Australian Command were going to interdict on enemy aerodromes prior to our arrival in the Solomons. Our first day's experience did not inspire us with much confidence in the efficiency of the "interdiction", for not only did a large force of high level bombers and fighters from Rabaul, 600 miles away, manage to get at us, but a team of dive bombers, quite unexpectedly, did so as well. The second day's attack by 40 T.B's and H.L.B's subsequently confirmed our opinions on the value of this interdiction; and we were glad indeed that we had U.S. naval aircraft cooperating directly with us.<sup>4</sup>

It might be remarked that the value of those U.S. naval aircraft would have been considerably reduced without the forewarning by the Bougainville coastwatchers.

By 2 p.m. on the 7th, Mikawa and his staff, working hurriedly in Rabaul on the plans for the projected surface attack, had completed them and sent them to Tokyo. Their reception was unfavourable. Admiral Osamu Nagano, Chief of the Naval General Staff, "considered the plan dangerous and reckless, and, at first, ordered that it be stopped immediately. Upon further consideration and after consultation with his staff, he decided to respect the local commander's plan".<sup>5</sup> *Chokai* entered Rabaul harbour at 4 p.m. on the 7th—just as the aircraft of the first striking force returned from Guadalcanal, five bombers and two fighters short of its departure strength that morning—and sailed again half an hour later with Mikawa and his staff on board, and with *Tenryu* (Rear-Admiral Matsuyama), *Yubari*, and destroyer *Yunagi* in company. Three hours out of Rabaul, they met the four heavy cruisers of the 6th Division from Kavieng, and "thus it was that our seven cruisers and one destroyer were assembled for the first time". As darkness fell, shortly after cruising disposition was taken up, an enemy submarine was detected "to the south", and course was altered to the east, successfully to avoid it. This was the American S 38 from Brisbane, whose captain, Lieut-Commander H. G. Munson, reported by radio "two destroyers and three larger ships of unknown type" proceeding south-easterly, and later stated that the Japanese ships had passed so close that he had felt their wash, and had been unable to fire

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Command air attacks on Japanese airfields in this "interdiction" operation were:

3 Aug—Two Catalina flying boats attacked Lae-Salamaua.

6 Aug—Six medium bombers (B-26) attacked Lae. Seven medium bombers (B-25) attacked Salamaua.

7 Aug—13 heavy bombers (Fortresses) attacked Rabaul. Ten medium bombers (B-26) attacked Lae. Three Catalinas attacked Lae.

8 Aug—One Catalina, two Fortresses, 11 medium bombers (B-26), six medium bombers (B-25) attacked Lae-Salamaua.

8-9 Aug—Two Catalinas attacked Rabaul.

9 Aug—Eight Fortresses attacked Rabaul; eight mediums (B-26) attacked Salamaua; one Fortress attacked Gasmata.

10 Aug—Two Catalinas attacked Rabaul.

At this period, of course, the Australian Command had also the Japanese invasion of Buna to deal with. The attention paid to Lae-Salamaua indicates this.

<sup>5</sup> Ohmae, "The Battle of Savo Island", p. 1270. Ohmae quoted Captain Sadamu Sanagi, who was on the Naval General Staff at the time.

torpedoes.<sup>6</sup> Munson, whose sighting report was received (via Comsouwespacfor, Vice-Admiral Leary) by Crutchley at 7.39 a.m. on 8th August, had better luck with torpedoes some hours later when, at midnight on the 8th, he intercepted *Meiyo Maru* and her escorts off Cape St George, New Ireland, and sank the transport with two torpedo hits. The report of enemy warships at sea near their base at Rabaul was by itself not particularly significant. If the enemy force made for Guadalcanal, it should be found the next day by Allied reconnaissance aircraft, whose search plans were designed with that purpose.

At dawn on the 8th, when his force was steaming south-east to the eastward of Bougainville, Mikawa catapulted five scouting seaplanes from his cruisers. They reported, at Guadalcanal and Tulagi, a count of Allied ships that "cast serious doubts on the results reported by our earlier air attacks, which had claimed two cruisers, a destroyer, and six transports sunk, plus three cruisers and two transports heavily damaged". Of importance to Mikawa was the negative information regarding American carriers. "We judged that if the enemy carriers were not within 100 miles of Guadalcanal there would be little to fear of a carrier-based attack unless it came this morning, or unless we approached too close to the island before sunset." Mikawa accordingly told his captains that he would go through Bougainville Strait, and then pass down the strait between Santa Ysabel and New Georgia Islands (later to become known as "The Slot") to approach Guadalcanal for a night attack at about half an hour after midnight. This time was later put back to 1.30 a.m. on the 9th. At 10.26 on the 8th, when he was some 30 miles north-east of Kieta, Mikawa was sighted by a Hudson aircraft piloted by Sergeant Stutt<sup>7</sup> of No. 32 Squadron, R.A.A.F. A float plane took off in an attempt to intercept the Hudson which successfully gained cloud cover over Bougainville, but was unable immediately to report the sighting of the enemy fleet because of radio failure. Mikawa assumed that his intentions were now known, and that he would be the subject of more Allied reconnaissance and, probably, of air attack. He therefore decided to delay his approach to Guadalcanal, and put back his attack one hour.

Stutt's aircraft reached Milne Bay at 12.42 p.m., 2 hours 16 minutes after sighting the Japanese fleet, having attacked two surfaced submarines en route. The aircraft was met by jeep and the crew taken to the operations room for debriefing, where they reported the sighting of "three cruisers, three destroyers, two seaplane tenders or gunboats, course 120 degrees, speed 15 knots". This report, however, did not reach Crutchley until 6.17 p.m. on the 8th.<sup>8</sup>

Another search, which would almost certainly have disclosed Mikawa's

<sup>6</sup> S. E. Morison, *The Struggle for Guadalcanal* (1949), p. 19, Vol V in the series.

<sup>7</sup> F-Lt W. J. Stutt, DFC. 7, 32, 6 and 24 Sqns. Student; of Kew, Vic; b. Melbourne, 24 Jan 1918.

<sup>8</sup> Morison (Vol V, p. 25) makes the following unwarranted criticism of the Australian Hudson's failure to report the sighting. "The . . . sighting by the Australian Hudson at 1026 August 8," he writes, "would have been the tip-off but for several unfortunate circumstances. The pilot of this plane instead of breaking radio silence to report as he had orders to do in an urgent case, or returning to base which he could have done in two hours, spent most of the afternoon completing his search mission, came down at Milne Bay, had his tea, and then reported the contact."



presence and indicated his intention, was unfortunately not carried out. On 7th August Admiral Turner requested Admiral McCain to send a Catalina reconnaissance aircraft north-west from Espiritu Santo via Malaita, even though it would cover part of the search area for which MacArthur's land-based aircraft were responsible. This search was not made and, in the words of Crutchley's Staff Officer Operations and Intelligence, Commander Gatacre,<sup>9</sup> "incredibly, neither Crutchley nor Turner was informed".<sup>1</sup>

Thus arose an unfortunate combination of circumstances which aided Mikawa in preserving the anonymity of his force, its composition, and its likely intention. The lateness of the receipt of the aircraft's report precluded a further and possibly more revealing search by air. "Course 120 degrees" as given in the report, calculated from the position in which they were sighted, would take the Japanese ships not through Bougainville Strait, but to the eastward of Choiseul and Santa Ysabel Islands; and "15 knots" was the sort of speed to be expected of converted merchantmen seaplane tenders. Thus the wording of the report led both Turner and Crutchley to the opinion that the Japanese force was of two seaplane tenders on passage with an escort; and the course led Turner to the view that the Japanese were bound for Rekata Bay on the western end of Santa Ysabel's north coast, there to establish a seaplane base from which to deliver torpedo bomber attacks on the Allied ships. Unfortunately, that was the last sighting of Mikawa's force—and it left the Allied admirals to conjecture on its composition, its destination, and its mission.

It was just after 2 p.m. on the 8th when the Japanese ships cleared Bougainville Strait and increased speed to 24 knots, unseen though "the sea was dead calm, and visibility was, if anything, too good". The coast-watchers, whose reports of approaching aircraft were of priceless value, were impotent in this instance. Mason was on Malabita Hill overlooking Buin and the waters embraced by Shortland, Fauro, and Bougainville Islands. Mikawa passed well to the eastward, sheltered from observation by some 40 miles of distance. Such aircraft as were within their ken while the ships were in Bougainville Strait were "friendly planes returning towards Rabaul by twos and threes. The lack of formation indicated that they had encountered heavy fighting. We watched them with grateful eyes." And, south of Bougainville Strait, as they sped down "The Slot", those in the ships followed audibly the aircraft of Fletcher's carriers returning to their ships after helping to repel the Japanese torpedo bomber attack on the Amphibious Force and its screening ships that morning. Those in *Chokai* "heard, loud and clear, much talk of flight deck conditions as planes approached their landing pattern, such as 'Green Base' and 'Red Base'." Mikawa concluded that he could be fairly sure of no air attack on the 8th, but that he would suffer "an all-out attack from their carriers on the following day. The very existence of the enemy flattops in the area was a

<sup>9</sup> Rear-Adm G. G. O. Gatacre, CBE, DSO, DSC; RAN, HM Ships *Renown*, *Nelson* and *Rodney* 1940-42; HMA Ships *Australia* and *Shropshire* 1942-44; Comd HMAS *Arunta* 1945-47; DCNS 1949-50, 1957-58; Comd HMAS *Anzac*, Korea, 1952-53. B. Wooroolin, Qld, 11 Jun 1907.

<sup>1</sup> Gatacre, in a post-war statement.

major concern to Admiral Mikawa, and this dominated our later tactical concepts.”

Late in the afternoon Mikawa passed his battle plans to his captains—to penetrate the sound south of Savo Island, torpedo the main Allied force at Guadalcanal, turn north to the Tulagi area, strike there with torpedoes and gunfire, and withdraw north of Savo. At 6.30 p.m. the ships jettisoned all deck fire hazards, and assumed night battle formation, single column on *Chokai*, with 1,300 yards between ships. Mikawa completed the Nelsonian touch of his plan with an “Every man is expected to do his best” signal to his sailors. Speeding south-east through darkness intermittently thickened by rain squalls, the ships trailed ghostly white streamer fingers from their signal yardarms as identification marks. Just after 11 p.m. they catapulted their aircraft for tactical reconnaissance; and, when it wanted but a quarter hour to the middle watch that was so pregnant with triumph and disaster, increased speed to 26 knots. Hands went to action stations at midnight on the 8th, as speed was lifted two knots more, and the ships drove swiftly and purposefully through the night.

## X

In the Guadalcanal and Tulagi landing areas at the end of this, the second day of WATCHTOWER, the situation was not quite as favourable as had been expected. Japanese opposition was particularly obstinate on the Tulagi side (where most of the defenders, true to their radio message to Rabaul, literally “fought to the death”) and Tulagi was not in Allied hands until the afternoon of 8th August, nor were Gavutu and Tanambogo subdued until nearly midnight of that day. There were some 5,000 Americans on shore on that side. Because of this, unloading of transports there had scarcely begun. On the Guadalcanal side, where some 11,000 Marines had landed by the evening of the 7th, the invaders were established from Tenaru to Kukum, including the airfield. The defenders, about 2,000, mostly labour troops, retired to the inland hills after only token resistance. Unloading operations were delayed by congestion on the beach, and also by air warnings, and air raids in which some damage was suffered by the ships.

At 10.27 a.m. on the 8th Crutchley received a message from the faithful coastwatchers on Bougainville: “Forty heavy bombers proceeding south-east.” Shortly afterwards the transports weighed, and the ships took up defensive dispositions. *Australia* was the first to see the attackers, and opened fire with her 8-inch and 4-inch gun batteries at noon on 23 torpedo bombers coming in low from the eastward over the southern tip of Florida Island.<sup>2</sup> All ships at once joined in with heavy anti-aircraft fire. Many of the bombers were shot down in flames. The Japanese later admitted to the loss of 17 torpedo bombers, and casualties were also inflicted on a number of dive bombers which carried out a synchronised attack. The

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<sup>2</sup> Gatacre later recalled that “USN officers at that time were amazed at 8-inch being used against aircraft, and were very impressed by the effectiveness of 8-inch barrage fire”.

destroyer *Jarvis* was hit by a torpedo, and suffered hull damage. She could, however, steam at between four and seven knots. She was sailed to Vila that night. Her orders were to proceed eastward through the Sealark Channel, but for some reason unknown she went westward and was sunk next day by Japanese aircraft with the loss of all hands—247 officers and men. Another casualty in the Japanese air attack on the 8th was the transport *George F. Elliott*, which was set on fire when an aircraft crashed into her superstructure. The fires got out of hand and she was abandoned, and grounded in the shoal water south of Florida Island.

Under the terms of his directive as second-in-command of Task Force 62 and commander of the screening groups, Admiral Crutchley was responsible for screening the transports of both X and Y Squadrons against Japanese surface, air, and submarine attack. Actually, events tend to indicate that both he and Admiral Turner placed the likelihood of enemy attack in the order air, submarine, surface. They were in agreement that dispositions against air attack should be the transports ringed by cruisers and, outside them again, destroyers. This ensured room for manoeuvre, and the protection of the transports by a double ring of gunfire. It proved most effective in the air attacks on the 7th and 8th. Crutchley considered submarine attack in the combat area highly probable by day and night—and his feeling in this was supported by Intelligence reports. The inner and outer screening circles afforded protection to the transports against submarine attack as well as against air attack, and in addition Crutchley maintained a continuous anti-submarine patrol by cruisers' seaplanes.

As to surface attack, this was not anticipated by day, but if it materialised Crutchley planned to intercept the enemy force outside the sound, remaining interposed between the enemy and the transport groups, but having room for manoeuvre. To guard against enemy attack by night, special dispositions were made. It was necessary for these to ensure as far as possible the provision of an adequate anti-submarine and anti-motor-torpedo boat screen, adequate anti-aircraft defences, and the denial to enemy surface forces of any approach to the transports. Such approach could be made from the north-west through either of the wide, unobstructed passages north and south of Savo Island, and (though this, because of navigational difficulties, was less likely except possibly by light craft) through Lengo, Sealark, or Nggela Channels from the east. To guard against all possible forms of enemy attack, Crutchley had six heavy cruisers: *Australia*, *Canberra*, *Chicago*, *Vincennes*, *Astoria*, *Quincy*; two light cruisers, *Hobart* and *San Juan*; and 15 destroyers.

In deciding how to use these he was influenced by various considerations, the main one being how best to ensure that the enemy could not reach the transports. The question of keeping the six heavy cruisers concentrated was considered, and discarded because Crutchley felt (a) that their concentration with two main western entrances to guard enhanced the chances of a hostile force slipping through undetected and unengaged; (b) that in his opinion heavy ships in groups of more than four were unwieldy at

night; and (c) "neither *Australia* nor *Canberra* were fitted with T.B.S.,<sup>3</sup> and they had done some night training with *Chicago* and *Desron 4*, but none with the other cruisers, thus it was my firm intention to avoid handling a mixed force at night".<sup>4</sup> Instead, therefore, of concentrating, he formed two heavy cruiser groups, one—*Australia*, *Canberra*, *Chicago*—patrolling in an area south-east of Savo Island and covering the southern entrance; the other—*Vincennes*, *Astoria*, *Quincy*—patrolling in an area north-east of Savo, guarding the northern entrance. Crutchley made this detailed composition of forces because:

I had three heavy cruisers from Task Force 44, partially trained to a method of night fighting and possessing a Task Force 44 doctrine Cruising and Operating Procedure. I had three heavy cruisers which I had never seen but all were U.S.N. and, therefore, to some extent certain to be used to each other's methods. I therefore decided to block one Savo entrance with the three heavy cruisers I knew I could command and leave the other Savo entrance to the three U.S. vessels.

In his "Special Instructions to Screening Group and Vessels Temporarily Assigned", which had been discussed with Turner and approved by him for distribution on 29th July, Crutchley described the composition of the two heavy cruiser groups he intended to use, and added:

Either or both groups may be brought against the enemy depending on the size and composition of his force. . . . If both *Australia* and *Vincennes* groups are ordered to attack the enemy, it is my intention that *Vincennes* group shall act independently of the *Australia* group but shall conform generally to the movements of the *Australia* group so as to give greatest mutual support.

The two light cruisers were allotted an area for night patrol covering the approach channels from the east. These channels were more likely to be used by light enemy surface craft or submarines, and the two light cruisers were the logical choice for this task. An additional advantage was that the use of *San Juan* provided a flag officer (Rear-Admiral Norman Scott, U.S.N.) in this ship. Of the fifteen destroyers, *Bagley* and *Patterson* were allocated to the *Australia* group and *Helm* and *Wilson* to the *Vincennes* group, as anti-submarine screen; and two to the light cruiser group. Seven were charged with the anti-submarine protection of the two transport groups. And two, *Ralph Talbot* and *Blue*, were radar guard ships to seaward of Savo Island, covering the entrances to warn of any approaching enemy. All ships were, by Crutchley's order, to be in "status of readiness number one for action". This had been ordered at midday on 6th August, and not relaxed except for the modification: "For the present when in first degree of readiness, small numbers may in turn be sent from their quarters to get meals."

These dispositions and patrols had operated on the night 7th-8th August without incident. At 6.30 p.m. on the 8th, Crutchley ordered the screening forces to take up night dispositions as for the previous night. *Australia*, with destroyers *Patterson* to port and *Bagley* to starboard broad on the bows, led *Canberra* and *Chicago*, in that order, ships three cables apart,

<sup>3</sup> Talk-Between-Ships. Voice radio.

<sup>4</sup> Crutchley, Explanatory Memorandum, 21 Feb 1943.

steaming 12 knots, patrolling an area between Lunga Point and Savo Island, cruising backwards and forwards parallel to and five miles from the Guadalcanal coast, on courses approximately N.W. by W. on the leg towards Savo, and S.E. by E. on the return leg, reversing course every hour. The northern group, under the tactical command of Captain F. L. Riefkohl in *Vincennes*, employed a box patrol, steaming at 10 knots in a square, turning 90 degrees every half hour. *Vincennes*, with destroyers *Helm* and *Wilson* broad on her bows, led *Quincy* and *Astoria* at three cables intervals.

At 8.45 p.m. Crutchley received a dispatch from Admiral Turner recalling him to the transport area to attend a conference in his flagship, the transport *McCawley*.<sup>5</sup> Fletcher had announced his intention of withdrawing the carriers, and the immediate future of the transports and screening groups with the consequent removal of their air cover was a matter of urgent concern. To have attempted the 20 miles by barge might well have meant Crutchley groping around the area most of the night, cut off from all that was going on through lack of communication and through having abandoned his flagship, with the possibility of not even finding *McCawley*, so he handed over charge of the patrol to Captain Bode, U.S.N., in *Chicago*,<sup>6</sup> at 8.55 p.m. and *Australia* left the screen for X transport group. Bode directed *Canberra* to lead the line in place of *Australia*, thus avoiding altering dispositions.

The night wore on. It was hot, oppressive, moonless, overcast, its gloomy caverns intermittently revealed by lightning flashes, or curtained by rain squalls. Visibility varied from 100 to 15,000 yards. There were light N.E. airs and a smooth sea. *Canberra* was in modified second degree of readiness. Half the Armament and Damage Control parties were closed up; the men off watch rested in the vicinity of their action stations;<sup>7</sup> the aircraft was de-fuelled, but bombed up with four 100-lb bombs; all guns were empty.

At midnight on the 8th, Lieut-Commander Mesley,<sup>8</sup> the navigator, put

<sup>5</sup> *McCawley*, US attack transport (1941), 9,304 tons, one 5-in and three 3-in guns, 16 kts. Sunk off Rendova, 30 Jun 1943.

<sup>6</sup> Crutchley did not inform Riefkohl in *Vincennes* of his departure, presumably because in his "Special Instructions to Screening Group" he had made it clear that the northern group should act independently if engaged with the enemy. Furthermore, ships would have intercepted Turner's signal to Crutchley and Crutchley's signal to Turner telling him when *Australia* would be approaching the screen round X transport group.

<sup>7</sup> Crutchley's order of 6th August for first-degree readiness had not been rescinded, but *Canberra*'s captain, Getting, in discussion with the commander, gunnery officer, torpedo officer and navigating officer, had decided that as the ship might be engaged in this operation at least until 11th August, the fatigue of personnel would not allow of continuous maintenance of first degree readiness. "It was decided that the time to relax was by night. In other words, the greatest danger apprehended was from air attack." (Evidence of the torpedo officer, Lieut-Commander J. Plunkett-Cole, at the Board of Inquiry into loss of *Canberra*.) Most of the other ships of the two groups were maintaining second-degree readiness. Admiral Hepburn, U.S.N., former C-in-C U.S. Fleet, who was ordered by the U.S. Secretary of the Navy in December 1942 to conduct an inquiry to determine the "primary and contributing causes of the losses and whether or not any culpability attaches to any individual engaged in the operation", declared "that the relaxation of vigilance by individual captains was their prerogative, and that the crews were not unduly fatigued". (Morison, Vol V, p. 32n.) It can be said that practice in the Royal Navies does not conform with this conception of an individual captain's prerogative.

<sup>8</sup> Capt J. S. Mesley, MVO, DSC; RAN. HMS *Hawkins* 1939-41; HMAS *Canberra* 1942; Comd HMAS *Vendetta* 1943-44; HMAS's *Australia* 1944-45, *Shropshire* 1945; Comd HMAS *Anzac*, Korea, and Capt (D) Dest Sqn 1953-54. B. Brunswick, Vic, 11 Dec 1910.

the ship on the S.E. by E. leg. Captain Getting was on the bridge. He and Mesley had discussed the Hudson aircraft's report of "three cruisers, three destroyers, two seaplane tenders or gunboats" received earlier that night. Mesley checked the reported position on the chart. Getting thought the report "referred to normal inter-island traffic. He actually mentioned that at Navy Office, Melbourne, there were constant reports of similar traffic."<sup>9</sup> About fifteen minutes after midnight Mesley (who was handling the ship all day, and was called at least every two hours throughout the night) went below to his sea cabin for a brief sleep, after directing the Officer of the Watch (Sub-Lieutenant Gregory<sup>1</sup>) to have him called at 1.45 a.m. to make the hourly course change and check the ship's position at 2 a.m. Soon afterwards, Getting also left the bridge to rest in his sea cabin. (Getting's normal night routine, the Torpedo Officer later reported, was to make "a particular point of never switching a light on in his cabin after darkening ship because of the effect it would have on his eyes. He slept—if he slept at all—fully clothed in a chair at the end of a voice-pipe from the compass platform.") There remained on the bridge the O.O.W., the Principal Control Officer, Lieut-Commander Wight;<sup>2</sup> the Midshipman of the Watch; Yeoman of the Watch; lookouts, and others.

At 1 a.m. course was altered to N.W. by W. (These regular alterations were made without signal, the cruisers altering 180 degrees in succession to starboard, the destroyers resuming their stations on the new course.) At intervals from midnight there had been sounds of single aircraft flying overhead. At 1 a.m. Wight reported this to Getting. They were heard in the other ships, too—and in some instances running lights burned by the aircraft were sighted—of the northern group as well as the southern. But the consensus of opinion was that they must be friendly aircraft, and the assertion of a junior officer in *Quincy* that they must be enemy "was regarded by his seniors as mildly hysterical".<sup>3</sup> Why, if they were enemy, was there no warning from C.T.F. 62, Admiral Turner? *Ralph Talbot*, the northern radar picquet destroyer outside Savo, sighted one of the aircraft, identified it as a cruiser-type float-plane, and at midnight broadcast a warning which, despite numerous repetitions, failed to reach Turner. Hence his silence on this matter—a silence which strengthened those of the screening groups, who heard *Ralph Talbot's* warning, in their assumption that the aircraft were friendly. But they were not friendly aircraft. Instead they were Mikawa's scouts. And they continued to drone overhead, unmolested, unhampered in their reporting back to him every movement of the ships beneath them.

At 1.40 a.m. *Canberra* was nearing the north-western extremity of her patrol. She steamed quietly along at 12 knots, her turrets trained fore and

<sup>9</sup> Mesley, evidence at the inquiry into the loss of *Canberra*.

<sup>1</sup> Lt-Cdr M. J. Gregory, RAN. HMAS's *Australia* 1939-41, *Canberra* 1941-42, *Adelaide* 1942-44, *Shropshire* 1944-46. B. Geelong, Vic, 9 Feb 1922.

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Cdr E. J. B. Wight, RAN. HMAS's *Canberra* 1940-42, *Bungaree* 1942-43; Comd HMAS *Warrnambool* 1944-45. Ship's officer; b. Majorca, Vic, 25 Feb 1907.

<sup>3</sup> Morison, Vol 4, p. 44.

aft. Many of her company were asleep. Some seven miles ahead of her was Savo Island. Fifteen miles ahead of her, in the open sea beyond Savo, U.S.S. *Blue* steamed across her track with radar eye sweeping the murky night to discover and warn of any approaching enemy. *Blue*, this guardian Cerberus of the southern portal, was seen at intervals by *Canberra* through the Australian cruiser's radar eye, for *Canberra* was using her Type 271 radar set for surface warning. It had, on previous occasions, detected the approach of cruisers at a distance of 30 nautical miles. On this night it was less penetrating. "In the area in which we were," Sub-Lieutenant Medley<sup>4</sup> *Canberra's* R.D.F. Officer subsequently told the Board of Inquiry, "operation of the set was extremely difficult, and not of very much value in my opinion . . . because of the surrounding land." Through it the operators could see *Blue* at intervals, and the other ships of the southern patrol group. But they did not sight any of the cruisers in the northern group. Nor did they sight any enemy.

Nor did *Blue*. And already, at 1.40 a.m. on the 9th, undetected, inside *Blue's* protective screen, within the sheltering loom of Savo Island whose camouflaging shadow was intensified by a low-hung rain squall, was *Chokai* at the head of the Japanese column, followed by *Aoba*, *Kako*, *Kinugasa*, *Furutaka*, *Tenryu*, *Yubari* and *Yunagi* in that order, racing in at 30 knots, every man tensed to immediate action, every one of their guns (34 of them 8-inch) and 60 torpedo tubes loaded and trained. And even then *Chokai's* torpedoes leapt into the water as she joined battle with a still unsuspecting foe.

## XI

As Mesley, in *Canberra*, put that ship on the S.E. by E. leg of her patrol at midnight on the 8th, Mikawa's men went to action stations. Forty minutes later those on *Chokai's* bridge saw Savo Island loom up fine on the port bow. Only another three minutes had passed when a Japanese lookout reported a ship three points on the starboard bow. It was identified as a destroyer, crossing from starboard, and distant about six miles. There were a few electric moments as, with every gun trained on her, the Japanese watched the destroyer—which was *Blue*, just approaching the turning point on her patrol. Mikawa slowed from 28 to 22 knots and ported his helm, and suddenly *Blue*, whose lookouts failed to see the Japanese, reversed course. Almost simultaneously the Japanese sighted *Ralph Talbot* on the port bow. She had already reached the limit of her westerly leg and had turned eastward, and also failed to sight the approaching enemy. This failure of the two picquet destroyers to sight the enemy, either by radar or visual means, is inexplicable. They had been selected for this duty because in the opinion of Comdesron 4 they had the most effective radar and radar operating capability of the nine ships in his squadron, and they had shown, in fair conditions, a certain pick-up range of not less than 10 miles on a cruiser target. Their plotted patrol beats

<sup>4</sup> Lt D. J. Medley, RANVR. HMAS *Canberra* 1942; Officer-in-Charge RAN Radar Lab 1942-45. Student; of Melbourne; b. London, 17 Aug 1919.

outside Savo were calculated by Gatacre (allowing a radar pick-up range of about seven miles) to cover any normal enemy approach to the Savo entrances. Yet their radar now failed to detect a force including five heavy cruisers approaching from a direction clear of obstacles. As to visual sighting, it is almost unbelievable that a column of heavy ships could steam close between two destroyers in this way, see them, but not be sighted by them. Events proved that Gatacre's calculations as to the positioning of the destroyers were correct. Mikawa should have been detected by both of them.

Thus fortune favoured Mikawa, who, unperceived, led his column between the two American destroyers which steamed away from it at right angles, on either side. At 1.30 a.m. on the 9th Mikawa increased speed to 30 knots. Six minutes later he detached destroyer *Yunagi*, last ship in his column, to guard his rear against possible attack by the destroyers he had passed. And then the Japanese sighted a destroyer to port (it was *Jarvis*, making her crippled way towards Vila) which did not sight them, and which was not attacked with gunfire, though some of the rear Japanese cruisers fired torpedoes at her, all of which missed. A minute later *Chokai's* lookouts sighted, almost dead ahead, the ships of the southern screening group, dimly seen in the darkness, but suddenly illuminated by a parachute flare released from one of the enemy aircraft over the Guadalcanal transport group. At 1.37 a.m. *Chokai's* torpedoes hissed from their tubes, and shortly afterwards the flagship, at 4,500 yards, *Aoba* at 5,500, and *Furutaka* at 9,000 yards, opened fire with their main batteries.

## XII

Meanwhile, on *Canberra's* bridge, the uneasy peace of the night was suddenly shattered. At 1.40 a.m. Lieut-Commander Wight saw, distant about 6,000 yards four points on the starboard bow, an explosion which appeared to be a torpedo hit. (It was probably one of the torpedoes fired at *Jarvis* exploding at the end of its run.) At the same time U.S.S. *Patterson*, five cables on *Canberra's* starboard bow,<sup>5</sup> altered course to port to cross, and commenced signalling. (She was the only ship to give the alarm, at 1.43 a.m., by T.B.S. "Warning—Warning. Strange ships entering harbour!" It was heard by the cruisers and destroyer *Wilson* in the northern group. She also reported three ships and their bearing by lamp to *Canberra*.) Wight sounded action stations. A lookout reported a ship right ahead, but she could not be discerned by either the O.O.W., Gregory, or the Duty Yeoman. She was possibly *Patterson*. Getting, Mesley, Lieut-

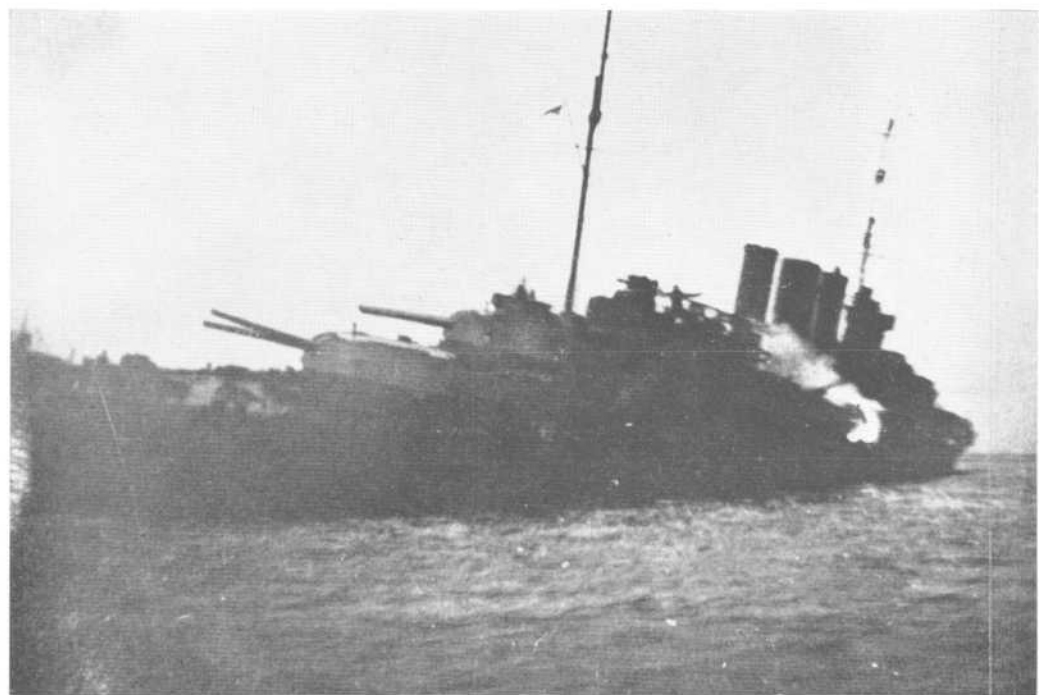
<sup>5</sup> The reports of *Canberra* differ from those of the three American ships regarding the respective positions on the screen of *Patterson* and *Bagley*. All *Canberra* evidence is that *Patterson* was on *Canberra's* starboard bow when the Japanese were first sighted. Wight's evidence at the Inquiry was definite: "*Patterson* was stationed approximately five cables, bearing Green 30, and she altered course to port to cross our bows and commenced signalling. That was the time of the torpedo explosion—the torpedo explosion was first and then I observed *Patterson* altering course." Mesley's sketch plan with the original report made by Plunkett-Cole to Crutchley shows *Patterson* on the starboard bow and *Bagley* on the port. The American reports were: *Patterson*—"Patterson screening western flank; *Bagley* eastern flank of cruisers"; *Bagley*—"Bagley 45 degrees on starboard bow of *Canberra*, *Patterson* on port bow"; *Chicago*—"USS *Bagley* and USS *Patterson* forming a close A/S screen ahead to starboard and port of the formation".





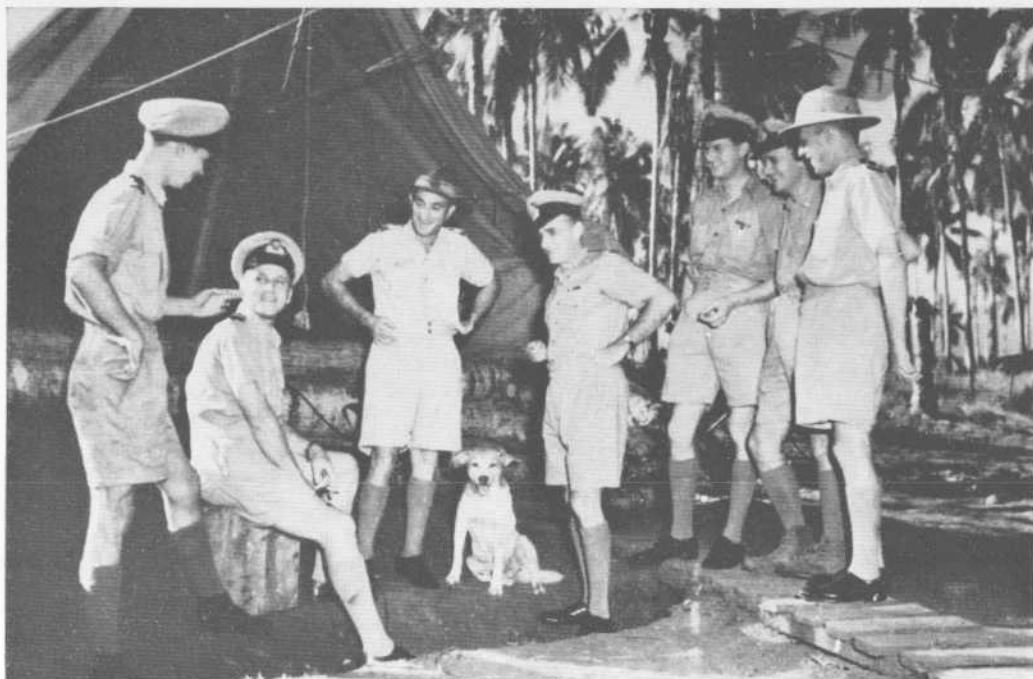
Captain F. E. Getting, R.A.N.,  
Captain of *Canberra* at Guadalcanal.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



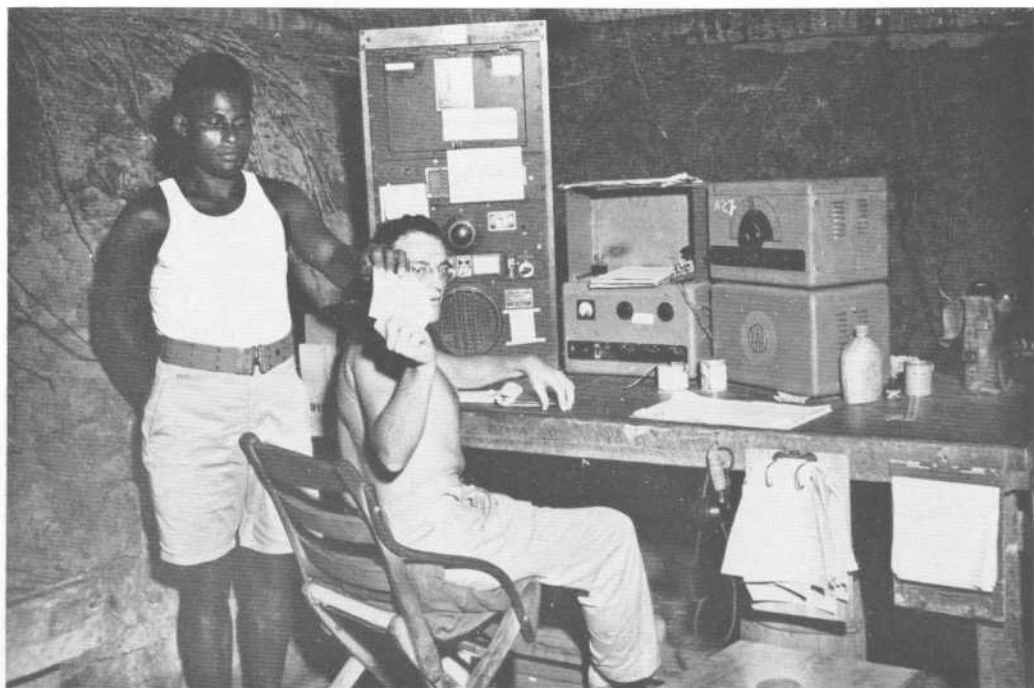
(Ordnance Artificer J. A. Daley)

H.M.A.S. *Canberra*, just before she sank—Battle of Savo Island, 9th August 1942.



(Lieutenant A. Dyce, R.A.N.V.R.)

Coastwatcher headquarters on Guadalcanal. *Left to right:* Lieutenant A. Dyce; Lieut-Commander H. A. Mackenzie; Flight Lieutenant R. A. Robinson, R.A.A.F.; "Koko"; Lieutenant F. A. Rhoades; Lieutenant J. G. F. Shotter; Lieutenant K. J. Patrick; Sub-Lieutenant C. B. Bell, grouped in front of the wireless hut.



(Department of Information)

W/T dugout at Control Station, headquarters of Deputy Supervising Intelligence Officer, Guadalcanal.

Commanders Hole<sup>6</sup> and Plunkett-Cole,<sup>7</sup> respectively Gunnery and Torpedo Officers, were called. Meanwhile Wight had sighted the wakes of three ships fine on the starboard bow against the blackness of the south end of Savo, and moving from port to starboard. He put the starboard Enemy Bearing Indicator on the left hand ship and ordered "Alarm starboard, Green 20, Load, Load, Load". He then heard the signalman report "that Patterson reports three ships bearing—I remember the signalman calling out after I had got the guns on—I can't remember the bearing he said because I was already on".<sup>8</sup> The others now arrived on the bridge and Hole took over at the starboard Enemy Bearing Indicator from Wight, who ordered "Port 35 degrees" to open "A" arcs. Mesley took over from Gregory, and Wight and Gregory left the bridge for their respective action stations—Wight aft in X turret, and Gregory in the fore control above the bridge.

As the ship started to swing to the port helm, one of *Chokai's* torpedoes was sighted, passing down the starboard side, having approached from fine on the port bow. Getting ordered "Hard a'starboard, full ahead!" Mesley now took over conning the ship. Plunkett-Cole, hearing the helm order, crossed to the port torpedo control position to fire the port tubes. Hole also moved across to the port Enemy Bearing Indicator, and ordered "Open Fire!" *Canberra* was swinging to starboard. Two flares, or star shell, were burning about 1,000 yards on the starboard beam. The three enemy ships were on the port bow, distant about 1,500 yards. Two more torpedo tracks were sighted ahead crossing from port, and Mesley "felt glad that the wheel was hard over to starboard and telegraphs to full speed as I thought we had a chance to get round in time to clear these tracks and with luck to miss the torpedoes".

Down in the engine rooms all machinery was running well. The main engines, because of the submarine reports, were at staggered revolutions, 118 on the outer, and 98 on the inner shafts, to give the ship 12 knots. When action alarm sounded the Engineer Commander, McMahon,<sup>9</sup> went to the forward engine room. "At about 1.44 a.m. 'Full Speed Ahead' was ordered on both engine room telegraphs. Revolutions were increased very rapidly on all units."

In the fore control the chain of action initiated by Wight when he caused the Enemy Bearing Indicator alarm gong to ring there had immediate results. The Gunnery Control Officer put the change-over switch to starboard to energise the Director, and ordered turrets "Follow Director". Within seconds Hole's voice reached him by voice pipe from the compass platform: "All quarters stand to", and almost immediately "With S.A.P., Load, Load, Load." The port Enemy Bearing Indicator was then operated

<sup>6</sup> Lt-Cdr D. M. Hole, RAN; HMAS *Canberra*. Of Artarmon, NSW; b. Sydney, 2 Feb 1905. Killed in action 9 Aug 1942.

<sup>7</sup> Capt J. Plunkett-Cole, RAN. HMS *Sussex* 1939-40; HMAS's *Napier* 1940-42, *Canberra* 1942; Comd HMAS's *Vendetta*, *Nepal*, *Norman* 1943-45. B. Melbourne, 4 Sep 1906.

<sup>8</sup> Evidence at Inquiry into loss of *Canberra*.

<sup>9</sup> Cdr O. F. McMahon, OBE; RAN. HMAS *Canberra* 1938-42; Dep Engr Manager, Garden Island 1942-46. B. Mareeba, Qld, 5 Jan 1900. Died 15 Dec 1966.

from the compass platform, and the Director Trainer was ordered to "Follow Port", and turrets to "Follow Director" and to "Open Fire".

On the port after side of the compass platform Hole was passing orders to gunnery control. Getting was standing alongside him. Mesley, sighting torpedo tracks on each side of the ship, ordered the helm to midships, and then "Port 35", to check the ship swinging to starboard, and was answered by the Chief Quartermaster from the lower steering position. The enemy ships were now on the port quarter. Mesley shouted down the plot voice pipe "Enemy report two unknown bearing 300 one mile".<sup>1</sup> Suddenly Mesley was temporarily blinded by an explosion just abaft the compass platform. This was of a shell from the first enemy salvo, which hit and wrecked the Plotting Office. The explosion knocked down Plunkett-Cole at the port torpedo control position on the bridge. He picked himself up and was pressing the pistol triggers when a shell from the second enemy salvo hit on the port after corner of the compass platform. This again dazzled Mesley, and: "When I could see again I saw several people on the deck of the compass platform and recognised the Captain, whose head was within two feet of the Pelorous to which I was clinging." This shell killed Hole outright, mortally wounded Getting, and killed and wounded others on the compass platform and in the port torpedo control position. There the triggers were unresponsive to Plunkett-Cole's attempts to fire the torpedoes and, wounded and with patches of fire burning on his overalls, he went up to the compass platform to report to Getting, found there the results of the second hit and Mesley conning the ship, and, as senior effective officer present, temporarily took over. But by then *Canberra*, without firing a shot, was out of the fight. Mesley had noticed the ship slowing down and listing. The Chief Quartermaster reported that the wheel was useless, and when Mesley ordered "Steer by main engines", reported that all communications and all power had completely failed. The second Japanese salvo had hit both engine rooms.

Down in the forward engine room at about 1.45 a.m. the main engines were working up to full speed, and revolutions, in that minute since full speed was ordered, were up to about 250 on all engines. There were noises as of gunfire "similar", McMahon later recalled, "to that experienced when our ship's armament was firing". Almost immediately light brown smoke and fumes entered the engine room through the supply fan trunking. Thuds were felt on the ship. Within seconds steam pressure to all units, and in both engine rooms, failed; and simultaneously all lights dimmed and died. Visibility, by torch, was about three feet. Within five minutes of the first alarm both now-useless engine rooms were abandoned.

In the fore control, the Gunnery Control Officer was momentarily blinded by the flash of the shell hit from the first enemy salvo, almost directly

<sup>1</sup> This never got through, as almost simultaneously the Plotting Office was hit and wrecked. Mesley, immediately after the second hit, ordered Chief Yeoman of Sigs C. J. Gunthorpe to make the enemy report. Gunthorpe passed the report to the Radio Communications Office but by then all power had gone. The report was eventually passed over the emergency set, but there was no acknowledgment of its receipt.

below. After the second hit on the compass platform, Sub-Lieutenant Gregory, who had only just arrived in the fore control, "happened to look forward and I saw star shell ahead, and I looked down on the bridge and I noticed several people lying on the bridge—I could make out the Captain as one of them". The turrets reported all main lighting had failed. The Director Trainer reported power gone, and gear was in hand training. An enemy cruiser was sighted on the port beam. She "passed through my glass quickly", recalled the Director Gunner, "and only a momentary glance was had. The Director Trainer had no target in his glasses at any time." So fire was not opened. When power failed *Canberra's* turrets were bearing "Red 120 degrees"—searching for their target which by now had disappeared.

In the sick bay was the main body of medical supplies, and the main medical party, comprising Surgeon Commander Downward<sup>2</sup> and eight ratings. There were also a forward party on the forecabin mess deck, and an after party in the wardroom, each commanded by a surgeon lieutenant. All three parties were closed up before the alarm. "Within about five minutes of the alarm sounding," Downward later reported,

there was a loud explosion in the Sick Bay flat, followed by the screams of wounded. Almost immediately the first casualty appeared with his left arm shot away. A tourniquet had just been adjusted and morphia injected to him and three other casualties, when the lights failed and all water supplies were cut off. From then on it became necessary for members of the first aid party to use their initiative and work as independent units. Very quickly the ship listed to starboard and the Sick Bay flat became untenable owing to heat from fires. The wounded were moved on to the forecabin, where they lay for about three hours in pouring rain. Coats and blankets were used to cover them as well as possible.

*Canberra* was under fire for only about two minutes. She was hit by at least 24 shells, which came from just before the port beam to fine on the starboard quarter, through astern. She was stopped, listing about eight degrees to starboard, blazing amidships and with many fires burning between decks. And one-sixth of her complement were killed or wounded.

### XIII

When, around 1.40 a.m., *Patterson*, on *Canberra's* starboard bow (according to *Canberra* evidence), altered course to port to cross, it was because she had sighted *Chokai* dead ahead, steering south-easterly distant about two-and-a-half miles, and changed course to unmask guns and torpedo batteries. A minute later the strange ship changed course to the eastward, and those on *Patterson's* bridge saw she was one of three Japanese cruisers—two heavy and one light. Commander Frank R. Walker, *Patterson's* captain, ordered "fire torpedoes"—an order that was not heard because at that moment the destroyer's guns opened fire—and passed an enemy report to *Canberra* and *Chicago* by lamp. A brief exchange of gunfire resulted in *Patterson* being hit and set on fire aft and suffering a number of casualties and, in turn, herself securing some hits on the

<sup>2</sup> Surgeon Capt C. A. Downward, DSC; RAN. HMAS *Canberra* 1940-42, HMAS's *Kuttubul* and *Rushcutter* 1943-45.

enemy light cruiser. The Japanese drew away to the north-eastward, and the clash was over. It was then about 2 a.m. *Patterson* made in a general north-eastward direction to a pre-arranged rendezvous five miles north-west of Savo Island.

*Bagley*, broader out on *Canberra*'s starboard bow, sighted the approaching Japanese fine on her port bow. They appeared to be very close to Savo, steering south-easterly at high speed. *Bagley* swung hard a'port to bring her starboard battery to bear, but when sights came on it was found that primers had not been inserted. She continued the swing until her port battery bore, when she fired four torpedoes. But at that moment the Japanese ships were lost to view. *Bagley* observed *Canberra* turn hard a'starboard, and "open fire with her main battery.<sup>3</sup> *Canberra* was hit amidships by second or third enemy salvo. An intense fire developed immediately. *Chicago* appeared to turn right with *Canberra*, and seemed to open fire at the same time." *Bagley*, after scanning the passage between Guadalcanal and Savo without sighting anything, also made for the pre-arranged rendezvous. With this failure of both destroyers effectively to fire torpedoes, an opportunity was lost which could have reversed the result of the night action. It was a night in which every link in the chain of events was a faulty one for the Allies.

When those in *Bagley* saw *Chicago* swinging hard a'starboard, they saw her reaction to torpedo wakes reported on her starboard bow. That was just four minutes after those on her bridge had been first alerted by two orange flashes near Savo Island. Aircraft flares were then seen over the transport area, and *Canberra* swung to starboard. Shortly after *Chicago* turned to starboard torpedoes were reported crossing from port to starboard, and *Chicago* swung hard a'port to parallel wakes. But by then the torpedoes were too close aboard, and one struck *Chicago* on the port bow well forward, deluging the ship to amidships with a lofty column of water. While her damage control parties shored up the forward bulkheads, *Chicago* received a minor shell hit from a cruiser on her foremast, and briefly and fitfully engaged various targets to the westward (apparently they were the destroyer *Yunagi* which, overhauling and passing *Jarvis* to the north of that ship, fired on the American destroyer about 2 a.m.) until, 23 minutes after the first alarm, "all firing ceased, no ships visible". All this time *Chicago* was steering a mean course of approximately N.W. by W.—with the battle sweeping north-east and northerly, away from her and towards the northern screening group, to which no enemy report (save that from *Patterson*) had gone, and the ships of which were to be caught as unprepared as those which had already fallen victims to Mikawa's force.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Bagley*'s action report. An example of mistaken observation in the "fog of war" of a night action. *Chicago*, in her action report, also states (1.47 a.m.) "*Canberra*, now on starboard bow, commenced firing".

<sup>4</sup> The complete loss of power prevented transmission from *Canberra* of Mesley's enemy report. *Chicago* (Morison, Vol V, p. 39) failed to make an enemy report.

Regarding this, Mikawa subsequently wrote (*United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, Vol 83, No. 12, p. 1278): "I was greatly impressed . . . by the courageous action of the northern group of US cruisers. They fought back heroically despite heavy damage sustained before they were ready for battle. Had they had even a few minutes' warning of our approach, the results of the action would have been quite different."

When Mikawa led his force north-eastward to round Savo Island, *Furutaka*, fifth in the line, swung more sharply to N. by E., and was followed by *Tenryu* and *Yubari*. The Japanese thus sped towards the northern screening group in two columns, and caught its ships in cross fire. The northern group was steering north-west at 10 knots. Those in the ships heard the Japanese aircraft from midnight onwards, at times, as *Quincy* recorded, "close aboard", but concluded they were friendly. About 1.40 the star shell over the transport area at Guadalcanal was seen from all ships. Those in *Quincy* thought it was from destroyers seeking the aircraft which had been heard. Then *Quincy* heard *Patterson's* "Warning, Warning! Strange ships entering harbour," and went to action stations. Soon afterwards the silhouettes of three cruisers were sighted rounding the southern end of Savo Island. These immediately burned searchlights, and opened fire.

*Astoria*, rear ship in the American column, was the first to be hit. Her initial warning was the sighting of star shell to the south. She went to action stations, and next moment was caught in the Japanese searchlights, and was the target for *Chokai's* opening salvo in this phase, short and ahead. *Astoria* replied quickly with a six-gun salvo. But fire was then checked because her captain, just arrived on the bridge, thought fire had been opened on friendly ships. *Chokai* fired four salvos without hitting, but *Astoria's* delay gave her enemy time to find the range and close, and a salvo into the American ship's superstructure set her ablaze, and lit the target for the Japanese gunners. From then on it was but a matter of minutes before she was a flaming, immobile, powerless wreck, the victim of "at least 17 large calibre hits and innumerable small calibre hits". In return she fired 12 salvos from her main batteries, and "one enemy vessel was definitely hit and possibly two".<sup>5</sup> First to be hit, *Astoria* was the last of the northern group ships to sink. She remained afloat (and it seemed that she might be salvaged) until her forward 5-inch magazine exploded and blew a hole in her port side below water, and she sank just after midday on 9th August.

*Quincy* received the worst battering and was the first to sink. Caught in Japanese searchlights the enemy could see her guns trained fore and aft "for incredible minutes", Ohmae recalled. "The turrets of enemy ships remained in their trained-in, secured positions . . . and we could actually distinguish the shapes of individuals running along the decks." Here was an echo of the night action at Matapan seventeen months earlier, when the British Mediterranean Fleet met the Italian cruisers *Zara* and *Fiume* and "simultaneously with the great flash of the *Warspite's* 15-inch guns

<sup>5</sup> Morison (Vol V, pp. 43-4) gives *Astoria* the credit for scoring two hits on *Chokai*, one on the staff chartroom, and one on a forward turret. He also says (p. 50) that *Quincy* hit *Chokai's* staff chartroom and a forward turret. Ohmae mentions *Quincy's* hits in "The Battle of Savo Island" (p. 1275), when he says: "From a group of three enemy ships the centre one bore out and down on us as if intending to ram. Though her entire hull from midships aft was enveloped in flames, her forward guns were firing with great spirit. . . . It appears, from post-war accounts, that this was the U.S. heavy cruiser *Quincy*, and she certainly made an impression on the men of our force. At short range she fired an 8-inch shell which hit and exploded in the operations room of *Chokai*, just abaft the bridge, and knocked out our No. 1 turret."





the enemy ships were illuminated by searchlights, unprepared, with guns trained fore and aft and men running along their decks. The action lasted less than five minutes, by which time the Italian cruisers were shattered, blazing wrecks.”<sup>6</sup> So, too, was *Quincy* a blazing wreck within minutes—the flaring aircraft on its catapult illuminating her for the Japanese gunners. She fought back, but hopelessly, repeatedly “hit by large and small calibre shells”. It was noted that

below decks, scattered all over in the wake of exploded shells, were small granular fragments that seemed about the size of “Grape Nuts” (breakfast food) glowing and burning everything they came in contact with.

An officer who, when the ship was dying, went to the bridge

found a quartermaster spinning the wheel trying to turn the ship to starboard, who said that the captain had told him to beach the ship. He had no steering control. Just then the captain rose up about halfway, and collapsed dead. No others were moving in the pilot house, which was thick with bodies.<sup>7</sup>

*Quincy* capsized and sank between 2.35 a.m. and 2.40 a.m. on the 9th. Most of her survivors were picked up by the destroyer *Ellet*.

*Vincennes* followed *Quincy* to the bottom within about five minutes. The victim of many 8-inch and 5-inch shells, and at least two torpedoes, on fire and immobile, it was, at 2.30 a.m., decided to abandon her. Fifteen minutes later the ship heeled over and sank.

The two northern destroyers, *Wilson* and *Helm*, escaped the fate of their cruisers. *Wilson* did see the enemy and engaged in a brief duel, fruitless to both sides, with *Chokai*. *Helm* never saw a Japanese ship. She chased here and there after suspects (one was apparently *Ralph Talbot*) and finally made for the previously appointed rendezvous north-west of Savo, where she met *Wilson*, and found other destroyers in the area, including *Selfridge* and *Mugford*.

Soon after 2 a.m., the noise of battle having died astern, *Chokai* was steering northerly. Ohmae, at the chart table, was checking courses when gunfire was reported on the port bow. It was from the open sea beyond Savo, where *Furutaka*, *Tenryu*, and *Yubari*, ran foul of *Ralph Talbot*, still on her radar patrol. In a brief exchange between the three Japanese cruisers and the lone destroyer, *Ralph Talbot* suffered extensive damage and had 11 killed and 11 wounded. A concealing rain squall probably saved her from destruction. By now, Mikawa had decided to retire. Time—and the threat it held of daylight air attack, for Mikawa did not know that Fletcher had already withdrawn and was some 140 miles S.E. of Guadalcanal—was drawing dawn swiftly nearer, and it would be almost on them before the scattered Japanese ships could regain formation, work up to battle speed, and reach the transport groups. At 2.23 a.m. Mikawa gave the order to withdraw, and the ships formed line ahead on *Chokai*,

<sup>6</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, p. 313.

<sup>7</sup> *Quincy*, report of senior surviving officer, 12 Aug 1942.

course N.W.½N., speed 30 knots. At sunrise the force was north of New Georgia, steaming swiftly over peaceful seas into a fine morning, while its commanders counted up the score.<sup>8</sup>

#### XIV

At the time of Mikawa's breaking off the action, neither Crutchley nor Turner had any idea of what had happened. The two met in Turner's flagship, *McCawley*, about 10.30 p.m. on the 8th (Crutchley was accompanied by Gatacre) and Vandegrift arrived soon after eleven. The three commanders agreed that, with the loss of Fletcher's air cover, the transports should leave at 7.30 next morning, "although Vandegrift was dismayed at the prospect of his 18,000 Marines being left with inadequate supplies and no naval support".<sup>9</sup> Crutchley asked Turner what he thought of the Intelligence report of the enemy force of three cruisers, three destroyers, and two seaplane tenders sighted east of Bougainville. Turner replied that it was his opinion that the force was destined for Rekata Bay, possibly from there to operate torpedo-carrying float-planes against our forces, and Crutchley concurred in this view.<sup>1</sup>

It was 1.15 a.m. on the 9th when Crutchley rejoined *Australia*, and after 1.30 when the ship cleared the transport area. Because of the brief remaining period before the screening groups would have to leave day stations so as to be back with the transports by first light, Crutchley decided not to rejoin the southern group, and ordered *Australia* to patrol in the vicinity of Squadron X transports. At 1.50 they saw a flare dropped in the direction of the channel south-west of Savo Island. Almost at once they sighted a few rounds of tracer fire, and then immediately a burst of heavy surface fire, and "there began a general night action which, at 1.56, appeared to move to the right and to increase tremendously in intensity". No enemy report was received, but Crutchley conjectured that the southern group had made contact with an enemy force, but "I felt confident that our five 8-inch cruisers and four destroyers then on patrol immediately inside Savo Island could effectively deal with any force likely to have been available to send against us".

*Hobart*, patrolling with *San Juan* on a north-south line south-west of Tulagi, saw flares at 1.45 a.m., and three minutes later heard firing, and saw the glow of a burning ship on the horizon. There was heavy gunfire, and "two or three ships quickly set on fire. At 1.55 the original burning ship was seen to be *Canberra*. At 2.24 a.m. three burning ships, including *Canberra*, could be seen between W. by N. and N.W."

Crutchley, in the absence of news, ordered *Australia* to patrol on courses

<sup>8</sup> From an analysis of the claims made by the individual ships, Mikawa's staff estimated that they had sunk five heavy cruisers and four destroyers. Their own losses amounted to 35 killed and 51 wounded. *Chokai* was the heaviest sufferer both in damage and casualties—with 34 killed and 48 wounded. The Japanese fired 1,020 8-inch shells; 768 5-inch and 5.5-inch; over 1,000 small calibre; and 61 torpedoes.

<sup>9</sup> Morison, Vol V, p. 31.

<sup>1</sup> Crutchley—Report on Operation "Watchtower", dated 13 August 1942. Explanatory Memorandum, dated 21 February 1943.

N.E. by E.—S.W. by W. about seven miles west of the transport group, to intercept any enemy which might get through the cruiser screen, and ordered all destroyers not in contact with the enemy to concentrate on him. Inability to decipher the position resulted in the destroyers concentrating instead in the previously arranged rendezvous north-west of Savo Island. Crutchley also, at 2.26, signalled the three screening groups asking if they were in action. *Chicago* replied "Were, but not now", and *San Juan* said "No—the action appeared to be with a surface force between Florida and Savo Islands." Through the remainder of the night scraps of information reached Crutchley, but at 5.47 a.m. he was still much in the dark when he signalled to the escort forces: "Situation obscure. Be prepared to give battle at dawn in vicinity transport groups", in view of the possibility of enemy ships still being in the area and able to attack the transports. He knew that *Canberra* was burning and abandoning ship, and that *Patterson* was taking off the crew; that *Chicago* had been torpedoed but was effective; that *Ralph Talbot* was badly damaged near shore north-west of Savo Island; and that the destroyers were concentrated five miles north-west of Savo. He was quite unaware of the situation in the northern screening group. At 5.32 he ordered Comdesron 4 (in *Selfridge*) to investigate the state of *Canberra* and, in accordance with a signal he had received from Turner when the last named was told of *Canberra's* plight, to sink the Australian cruiser if she was not, by 6.30 a.m. ready to join in the retirement plan.

Meanwhile in *Canberra* the commander, J. A. Walsh (himself badly wounded), who had been directing the fire-fighting amidships, had reached the bridge with assistance. He conferred with Getting (who was still conscious) and with Commander McMahon who had arrived to report the damage below. This was five or ten minutes after the start of the action. About this time, too, Surgeon Commander Downward arrived on the bridge. He found the captain

lying on his back. The Commander was standing on the port side of the bridge. The Gunnery Officer's body was on the port side. I spoke to the Captain but he refused any attention at all. He told me to look after the others.

Strenuous efforts were made to control the fires, using bucket chains in the absence of power and water pressure. Ammunition on deck was dumped overside, and magazines were flooded. Heavy rain<sup>2</sup> helped those fighting the upper deck fires, but reports from between decks were not hopeful, and the list gradually increased to about fifteen degrees. About 3 a.m. *Patterson* was seen on the port bow. She went alongside (after waiting while some ammunition on the 4-inch gun deck exploded) at 3.25, by the bridge, port side. Hoses and portable pumps were passed to *Canberra*, who commenced transferring wounded—including Getting, now unconscious—to the destroyer. Twenty minutes later *Patterson* passed to

<sup>2</sup> "I sent Midshipman J. M. Johnston and Sub-Lieutenant R. M. Dawborn to collect blankets, etc., from the sea cabins," Mesley later recorded, "and they and several others produced coverings for the Captain, Commander, and the Gunnery Officer's body."

*Canberra* the order that if she was not ready to steam by 6.30 she was to be abandoned and destroyed. It was obvious that she could not be ready by then, and Walsh gave the order to return hoses and pumps to *Patterson*, and prepare to abandon ship. This abandonment was delayed, recorded *Patterson's* captain, "because none of *Canberra's* crew would leave the ship until all wounded were removed".

At this stage there was a diversion. Mesley later described it:

Suddenly, about 4.30 a.m., the order was shouted from *Patterson*: "Out all lights!", and almost immediately she passed the word that she would have to leave as she had sighted a hostile ship on the port quarter. The transfer of wounded was stopped, *Patterson* went ahead, parting or cutting the lines and letting the planks fall into the water. The parting words of her captain were "We'll be back", which were very cheering words indeed. Scarcely had she started to move when a ship resembling *Chicago* opened fire from our port quarter and all hands made a very hasty dive for cover. Everyone on the "B" gun deck took shelter behind the barbette but the expected explosions did not come, and it soon became evident that *Patterson* had drawn all the fire as she and the enemy disappeared ahead.

The suspected enemy was, in fact, *Chicago*. She and *Patterson* exchanged gunfire, and then the display of emergency signals established identification. At daylight, about 5.50 a.m., *Chicago* and *Patterson* returned to *Canberra*, with *Blue*, and the two destroyers completed removal of the cruiser's wounded and survivors. In all 29 officers and 372 ratings were transferred to *Patterson*, and 22 officers and 321 ratings to *Blue*. Of the total number of 819 borne in *Canberra*, casualties were 193. Missing believed killed were 9 officers (of whom one was R.A.A.F. and one U.S. Navy) and 65 ratings (three R.A.A.F., two Royal Navy); died of wounds were one officer (Captain Getting, who died in U.S.S. *Barnett*<sup>3</sup> on passage to Noumea and was buried at sea), and 9 ratings (one R.A.A.F.); and wounded, 10 officers (one R.N.), 96 ratings (2 R.A.A.F., 1 R.N. and 2 U.S.N.), and three civilian Canteen Staff. There were 40 officers and 586 ratings unwounded survivors. Of *Canberra's* company, Commander Walker, *Patterson's* captain, wrote to Admiral Crutchley four days after the action:

The Commanding Officer and entire ship's company of the *Patterson* noted with admiration the calm, cheerful and courageous spirit displayed by officers and men of the *Canberra*. When *Patterson* left from alongside because of what was then believed to be an enemy ship close by, there were no outcries or entreaties—rather a cheery "Carry on *Patterson*, good luck!"—and prompt and efficient casting off of lines, brows, etc. Not a man stepped out of line. The *Patterson* feels privileged to have served so gallant a crew.

About 8 a.m. on the 9th, in position 9 degrees 10 minutes 40 seconds South, 159 degrees 52 minutes 15 seconds East, *Canberra* sank. *Selfridge*, in accordance with Crutchley's instructions, attempted to sink her. She fired 263 5-inch shells and four torpedoes (one of which exploded under *Canberra's* bows) but the tough old "John Brown's body" of the Australian cruiser refused to sink. At this juncture U.S.S. *Ellet* appeared on

<sup>3</sup> *Barnett*, US attack transport (1943), 9,432 tons, one 5-in and three 3-in guns, 16 kts.

the scene. Her Commanding Officer thought *Selfridge* was engaging a disabled Japanese cruiser, and joined in with an opening salvo at 5,000 yards. It was finally one of her torpedoes which administered the fatal blow to *Canberra*.<sup>4</sup>

Other destroyers, at this time, were away to the northward, rescuing from the water the survivors from *Quincy* and *Vincennes*. *Astoria* was still afloat but despite efforts by *Bagley*, *Wilson* and other destroyers to help her, she could not be saved, and finally sank just after noon. In all, in addition to their ship losses, American casualties in the Savo Island battle were 939 killed or died of wounds, 654 wounded.

Because the night's events delayed the unloading of transports, the withdrawal planned for 7.30 a.m. was postponed. Unloading, interrupted by an anticipated air attack (a coastwatcher's warning was received but no attack materialised) went on throughout the morning, and about 3.30 p.m. X Group transports and supply ships, escorted by *Chicago*, *Mugford*, *Patterson*, *Ralph Talbot*, *Dewey*, and the five destroyer minesweepers, proceeded eastward through Lengo Channel. At 7 p.m. they were followed by the ships of Y Group escorted by *Australia*, *Hobart*, *San Juan*, and the remaining ten destroyers. Course was south-easterly until the evening of 10th August, when it was altered to S.S.E., steering down between the New Hebrides and New Caledonia. At daybreak on the 11th the Y Group overtook the X detachment, and the two groups assumed cruising formation. That evening a section of eight transports was detached to Second Channel, Espiritu Santo. The remainder of the force—less six Pacific Fleet destroyers which left to rejoin the carrier groups from which they had been detached for the WATCHTOWER operation—entered Noumea, New Caledonia, in the early afternoon of Thursday, 13th August 1942.

## XV

At the time of the withdrawal of the transports and naval forces from the area, General Vandegrift reported:

We hold Tulagi, Gavutu, Makambo, Tanambogo, and have 5,000 men that area which was taken only after bitter fighting due restricted areas. Our casualties there estimated about 450. Japanese casualties 100 per cent running over 1,000. Also hold Kukum to Koli Point, Guadalcanal. Digging in to defend beaches. Patrolling to mop up garrison 300 troops and two thousand pioneers who withdrew to bush. Have disposed of a number and have suffered a few casualties. Airfield ready for fighters and dive bombers.

So far the heavy costs of the invasion had been paid by the Allied naval forces. In "Subsequent Deductions" made in February 1943, Admiral Crutchley attributed the high cost of achieving "our object, which was to prevent the enemy from reaching the transports", to:

- (1) lack of experience—particularly at night fighting;
- (2) lack of alertness in almost every ship, probably due to fatigue of Captains, bridge and control officers;

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<sup>4</sup> Combat Narrative, Office of Naval Intelligence, US Navy.

- (3) absence of *Australia* from the *Australia* group;
- (4) failure of the majority of ships to receive the T.B.S. warning broadcast by *Patterson*.

Amplifying his remarks on lack of night-fighting experience, Crutchley commented that though before the war the Royal Navy paid much attention to night-fighting training, few, if any, ships had opportunity for such training during the war. The earlier night actions fought by the British naval forces on the whole proved successful, but

now a generation of Commanding Officers has grown up without the benefit of peacetime training in a responsible position and many of the more junior officers with virtually no night training. I do not know how much the above remarks apply to the U.S. Navy, but I am of the opinion that they are suffering to some extent from the same disability.

He felt that the absence of *Australia* contributed to the Allied losses not solely because of the reduction in numerical strength, but because

*Australia* has, during the war, seen much service. . . . The bridge officers in *Australia* are more experienced. I know that they were informed by their Captain of the objects of the movements of the group and that they were constantly alert. I am confident that *Australia* would have been quickly into action and that she would have given a good account of herself. Whereas *Canberra*, leading the line by order of *Chicago* (the officer-in-charge of the group), was a recently commissioned ship commanded by a Captain who had been there less than two months.

Farncomb, captain of *Australia*, spoke of the fatigue induced by prolonged alertness, and the necessity to find means of obviating this. In his "Letter of Proceedings" dated 12th August 1942, he wrote:

The prolonged periods spent at action stations, day and night, with very little rest, coupled with a mental strain, first, during the approach, when the reception we were likely to meet could not be gauged, and subsequently, during the periods of waiting for enemy air attacks and submarine and surface ship attacks, were calculated at times to produce a feeling of lassitude, both mental and physical. Of this I can give personal testimony. . . . I feel that in operations of this sort, some relief must be given from the continuous state of alertness required, either by providing extra complement to enable key officers and ratings to be in watches during periods of a high degree of readiness, or by relieving ships temporarily after a couple of days.

Remarking that fatigue must reduce efficiency to danger point if a "fresh" enemy were met, Farncomb warned:

Continuous alertness of a high order is essential in operations near enemy bases and therefore the often-forgotten adage that "Men fight, not ships", should not, once more, be forgotten.

It was an echo of Cunningham's letter to the Admiralty at the Battle of Crete in May 1941, "that effect of recent operations is cumulative. . . . It is inadvisable to drive men beyond a certain point"; and of Doorman's warning to Helfrich on the eve of the Battle of the Java Sea in February 1942: "This day the personnel reached the limit of endurance; tomorrow, the limit will be exceeded."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, p. 608.

A Board of Inquiry into the loss of *Canberra* was held in Sydney during August and September 1942.<sup>6</sup> Summarised, its main findings were that *Canberra* was not in a proper state of readiness in that guns were not loaded, and that the complete surprise achieved by the enemy, coupled with his instant effective action, resulted in *Canberra's* failure to engage; that the damage she suffered was caused by gunfire and that she was *not* torpedoed; that the flooding of magazines probably contributed to the list and subsequent loss of the ship; that the general behaviour of the ship's company was satisfactory, and that "there is no doubt that frequent changes in complement even in the lower ratings may seriously affect the efficiency of the Damage Control and Fire and Repair parties, and such changes should be kept to a minimum".

Comment was made in the findings on the apparent overlooking of the possibility that the aircraft observed overhead for more than an hour before the attack were enemy. That this was generally overlooked is the more remarkable in that precisely similar reconnaissance by precisely similar aircraft was carried out before the Japanese raids on Sydney and Diego Suarez little more than two months earlier. And both *Canberra* and *Chicago* had first-hand experience of the reconnaissance over Sydney.

In a letter to the Naval Board in November 1942,<sup>7</sup> Admiral Crutchley expressed disagreement with the Board of Inquiry's finding that *Canberra* was not torpedoed. He remarked that he had "read all the evidence, both that given at the inquiries and that written by survivors who were not examined. I have studied a great deal of information in the various reports of ships which have been torpedoed. I have discussed the matter at great length with the Squadron Engineer Officer." Pointing out that in something like two minutes from the time she was first struck, *Canberra* was powerless with a list of about seven degrees to starboard while nearly all the shell damage was caused by fire from her port side, he went on to advance detailed reasons for his conclusion that the initial list of about seven degrees to starboard, and the sudden loss of all power, was "exactly what should have been expected from a torpedo hit which had made a large breach in the starboard side in the vicinity of 127 bulkhead. This breach would immediately flood both boiler rooms and account for loss of steam and death of ratings." With regard to the Board's comments that frequent changes in complement could affect efficiency, he remarked in the same letter: "To our cost we all know this." The matter of such changes was one that concerned those in the ships, and writing at the same time to the First Naval Member, Admiral Royle, Crutchley regretted that he had "sprung another [letter] on you about drafting", but "I felt I ought to as I have had a lot to do with it from the sea and depot ends this war. An instance is *Hobart* sailed from Sydney ten days ago; I have since had her at sea for eight days, and today there are 17 changes."

<sup>6</sup> The Board, under the presidency of Rear-Admiral Muirhead-Gould, had as members: Captain A. H. Spurgeon, A/Captain W. L. G. Adams, RN; A/Captain J. M. Armstrong; Engineer Captain L. J. P. Carr; Paymaster-Commander J. O'Reilly.

<sup>7</sup> Letter A.F. 904/1056/15 of 8th November 1942, "Loss of HMAS *Canberra*".

## XVI

Throughout 9th August, while the Allied ships at Guadalcanal continued unloading so as to leave, before their departure that evening, as much nourishment as possible for the Marines on shore, Mikawa's force sped north-westwards towards its bases. At 10 a.m., when just south of Bougainville, Mikawa detached the four ships of the *6th Cruiser Division* for Kavieng, while *Chokai*, with *Tenryu*, *Yubari* and *Yunagi*, made for Rabaul. Both forces went to the east of Bougainville. The *6th Cruiser Division* continued north-westerly, well to the north-eastward of New Ireland. Around 9 a.m. on the 10th, some 150 miles due east of Kavieng, course was altered to west for their destination. A few minutes later—about the time Mikawa's force entered Rabaul—the small American submarine *S 44*,<sup>8</sup> based on Brisbane, sighted the *6th Cruiser Division*, attacked from a range of 700 yards, and torpedoed *Kako*, which sank within five minutes with the loss of 34 killed. (The Japanese submarines ordered to the Guadalcanal area—*I 121*, *I 122*, *I 123*,<sup>9</sup> and *RO 33*—arrived too late to be of any service, on 9th, 10th, and 11th of August.)

On his arrival at Rabaul, Mikawa received an enthusiastic message of congratulations from Yamamoto. But subsequently the withdrawal without destroying the Allied transports was bitterly criticised. Ohmae's reasons for "our early retirement" (which Mikawa later said were those that influenced him at the time) were "based in part on the Japanese Navy's 'decisive battle' doctrine that destruction of the enemy fleet brings an automatic constriction of his command of the sea". That air power invalidated this doctrine was not at this time appreciated by the Japanese. Another reason behind Mikawa's decision to retire was the fact that with the lack of a unified command of air and surface forces "we in the *Eighth Fleet* ships could simply not expect of our land-based planes the degree of cooperation required to cover us in a dawn retirement". With the benefit of hindsight, Ohmae saw

two grievous mistakes of the Japanese Navy at the time of the Guadalcanal campaign: the attempt to conduct major operations simultaneously at Milne Bay and in the Solomons, and the premature retirement from the battle of Savo Island. I played a significant part in each of these errors. Both were a product of undue reliance on the unfounded assurances of our Army [that it would not be difficult to drive out whatever meagre American forces might be delivered to Guadalcanal] and of a general contempt for the capabilities of the enemy. Thus lay open the road to Tokyo.

It was the denial of the southern Solomons and of the Guadalcanal airfield to the Japanese which placed the feet of the Allies firmly on the road to Tokyo. Their dislodgment at this juncture should have been the paramount concern of the Japanese; but that other horn of the Japanese dilemma—Port Moresby and its threat to Rabaul—was also demanding, and the enemy strove to meet both demands simultaneously. Thus while

<sup>8</sup> *S 44*, US submarine (1925), 850 tons, one 4-in gun, four 21-in torpedo tubes, 14½ kts. Sunk off Kurile Is, 7 Dec 1943.

<sup>9</sup> *I 121*, *I 122*, *I 123*, Japanese submarines (1926-27), 1,142 tons, one 5.5-in gun, 14½ kts. *I 122* sunk off west coast of Japan, 10 Jun 1945; *I 123* sunk off Guadalcanal, 29 Aug 1942.



inadequate preparations for the ejection of the Marines from the southern Solomons were put in train, the invasion of New Guinea at Buna and Milne Bay continued. On 12th August the convoy, carrying the main *Nankai Detachment* to Buna, which had sailed from Rabaul on the 6th and been recalled when news of the Solomons invasion was received, again left Rabaul, escorted by *Tatsuta*, *Yuzuki*, *Yunagi*, and submarine chasers. It entered Buna anchorage on the 13th, and landed its men and supplies without loss, despite Allied air attacks on the anchorage. Four days later another convoy of three transports, carrying the *South Seas Detachment*, and air base material of the *25th Air Flotilla*, left Rabaul similarly escorted. It was covered against air attack by a Japanese air raid on Moresby (the 78th) by 24 heavy bombers. They struck at the Seven Mile airfield, and destroyed 5 Allied aircraft and badly damaged 11, and demolished the control tower and operations hut. The convoy reached Buna on the 18th, and was followed next day by one of two transports and escorts.

## CHAPTER 6

### SPARRING FOR THE NORTH

THE Allied attack on Guadalcanal, because of the demands it made on Japanese submarines not only as combat vessels but also as supply carriers to the troops on that island, caused the temporary cessation of the submarine campaign against Australian coastal shipping which had been resumed—after a lull of nearly six weeks from the sinking of *Guatemala* on 12th June—in the second half of July. The quiescent period led the Naval Board, on 15th July, to cease all routine coastal convoys. Five days later, at 11 p.m. on 20th July, the Greek *George S. Livanos* (4,835 tons) was torpedoed and sunk, with no casualties, 15 miles off Jervis Bay. Three hours after the sinking, the Japanese submarine (possibly *I 11*<sup>1</sup> of the *3rd Submarine Squadron*, which claimed two ships south of Sydney at this time<sup>2</sup>) secured another victim when, at 2 a.m. on the 21st, in approximately the same position, it torpedoed the American *Coast Farmer* (3,290 tons). The torpedo hit amidships and the ship sank in 20 minutes, with the loss of one crew member. The submarine surfaced and examined the sinking ship by searchlight, but did not molest the survivors. The next blow was struck (possibly by *I 24*) some 27 hours later and 100 miles farther south, when the American *William Dawes* (7,177 tons) was torpedoed at 5.30 a.m. on the 22nd off Tathra Head. The explosion set the ship on fire. She remained afloat for some hours, but subsequently sank. Survivors (five of the crew were killed) were landed at Merimbula.

At 6 p.m. that day routine convoys were reintroduced. Ships excepted from sailing in convoy were coastal and overseas defensively armed ships capable of 12 knots or over, and ships incapable of maintaining the minimum convoy speed of seven knots. Ships in both these categories were sailed independently on inshore convoy routes.<sup>3</sup>

The Australian coastal steamer *Allara* (3,279 tons), with a full cargo of sugar from Cairns for Sydney, was one of the defensively armed ships sailing independently, and was the next victim when she was torpedoed off Newcastle, New South Wales, at 5.15 a.m. on the 23rd. *I 174* was the attacker, and fired two torpedoes, one of which missed while the other blew *Allara's* stern off, hurled her gun overboard, and killed four men. Three minutes later *I 174* surfaced on the port quarter, and was somewhat erroneously reported by *Allara's* lookout, in the excitement of the moment

<sup>1</sup> *I 11*, Japanese submarine (1942), 2,443 tons, one 5.5-in gun, one aircraft, 24 kts. Sunk east of Marshall Is, 17 Feb 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Hashimoto, *Sunk*, p. 258.

<sup>3</sup> The main problem was the provision of escort vessels. On 8th August Brigadier-General R. J. Marshall, U.S. Army, commanding USASOS sought greater escort protection for Townsville-New Guinea convoys "in view of the greatly increased U.S. army transport operation out of Townsville. . . . At the present time there are only two Australian corvettes available for this duty." Sutherland, MacArthur's Chief of Staff, replied that "the Navy is giving the maximum assistance which is possible at present".

as "a great bloody submarine on the port side".<sup>4</sup> As he now had no gun, and thought that the submarine might open fire, *Allara's* captain temporarily abandoned ship. When, after some little while, *I 174* went off, the survivors returned to *Allara*, which was subsequently towed into Newcastle.

During the rest of July there were some incidents, but no more sinkings on the Australian coast. But away to the eastward, 90 miles south-west of Noumea, the Dutch *Tjinegara* (9,227 tons) was torpedoed and sunk by *I 169*<sup>5</sup> on the 25th. There were no casualties.

Among the coastal encounters, the Australian *Murada* (3,345 tons) was unsuccessfully attacked by torpedo, with neither damage nor casualties, off Crowdy Head at 9.45 a.m. on the 24th. H.M.A.S. *Cairns*<sup>6</sup> (Lieutenant MacMillan<sup>7</sup>) fruitlessly attacked a submarine about 20 miles south of Newcastle on the 26th, and at 4.45 a.m. next day, away to the south, the Australian *Coolana* (2,197 tons) was attacked by gunfire some 30 miles north of Cape Howe, without damage or casualties. There were some reported sightings and other contacts, and Japanese attempts to confuse by simulating submerged submarines were indicated by the finding by a fisherman off Narooma on 31st July of a dummy periscope made of a 9-foot bamboo spar, with a mirror at the top, and weighted at the bottom to keep it floating upright. The closing days of July were marked also by air raids on Townsville, where bombs were dropped on the nights of the 26th, 27th, and 28th, causing neither damage nor casualties.

Western Australia came into the picture on 28th July when an aircraft bombed a submarine 45 miles south-west of Albany, without result. It was possibly this submarine which, a week later, shelled and chased the Australian passenger liner *Katoomba*, bound from Fremantle to Adelaide, when she was some 200 miles S.S.E. of Esperance on 4th August. The attack began at 7.10 p.m. and the chase continued, with intermittent gunfire from the submarine, for three hours, when the liner's speed and return fire presumably caused the Japanese to break off the attack. *Katoomba* and her people were unhurt.

The final sinking on the New South Wales coast in 1942 was that of the trawler *Dureenbee*, on 3rd August. One of Cam and Sons ships, of 223 tons, *Dureenbee* had just hauled her trawl, and shot the net again while her crew were stowing fish. There was a half moon in a cloud-wracked sky, and the ship plunged to a lumpy sea. At 0.45 a.m. a submarine—*I 24* or *I 11*—broke surface, and lay scarcely moving about 200 yards on *Dureenbee's* starboard side. She then opened fire with her deck gun. The trawler's master, Captain William Reid, hailed the submarine with "Ship ahoy! This is only a fishing craft." The reply, after some moments, was more shell fire from the submarine's deck gun. For some

<sup>4</sup> Chief Officer's Report.

<sup>5</sup> *I 174*, *I 169*, Japanese submarines (1934-38), 1,400 tons, one 4-in gun, 23 kts. *I 169* sunk off Truk, 4 Apr 1944.

<sup>6</sup> HMAS *Cairns*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>7</sup> Lt-Cdr E. MacMillan, RANR. HMAS *Orara*; comd HMAS *Cairns* 1942-44. B. 20 Dec 1887.

time, and at close range, she battered *Dureenbee* with intermittent shell and machine-gun fire, and when she finally submerged and disappeared two of the trawlermen were dead, and three wounded, one of these—the captain's brother, Alexander Reid—fatally. *Dureenbee*'s bridge was smashed, her funnel shot away, and she was holed and on fire. The 50-ton seine fishing boat *Mirrabooka* put out from port and landed the survivors and two dead from the trawler, the wreck of which drifted for some hours and finally went ashore about a mile north of Moruya Heads.

August saw two Australian ships suffer submarine attack in the Gulf of Papua. In both instances the assailant was *RO 33*, which was herself, as a result of the second attack, destroyed by H.M.A.S. *Arunta*. At 10.34 a.m. on 6th August the Burns Philp *Mamutu* (300 tons), with a crew of 39, and 103 passengers (11 whites, 13 New Guinea natives, and 79 half-castes) sailed from Port Moresby for Daru, approximately 250 miles distant W by N from Moresby, on the western coast of the Gulf of Papua. At 11.10 a.m. on the 7th, when about two-thirds of the way across the gulf, she reported by radio that she was being attacked by a submarine. *RO 33* sank her victim by gunfire, and later cruised among the survivors in the water—men, women, and children—and machine-gunned them. Survivors were later seen, boatless, in the water, and rafts were dropped by Allied aircraft. H.M.A.S. *Warrnambool*, from Moresby, searched the area where *Mamutu* was attacked and thirty miles to leeward all day on the 8th, but found no trace of wreckage or survivors. Of the ship's complement, 114—32 crew and 82 passengers—were lost. Survivors drifted ashore on aircraft rafts.<sup>8</sup> On 29th August, *RO 33*—as is recounted in detail later—torpedoed the Burns Philp *Malaita* (3,310 tons) in the approaches to Port Moresby. On 1st September, some 300 miles east of Brisbane, the American *Paine Wingate* (7,000 tons), reported having sighted the wake of a torpedo. It was the last report of any submarine activity in or near Australian waters in 1942.

Meanwhile moves were made on both sides to decide the immediate fate of the southern Solomons. On Guadalcanal, apart from disposing of the original Japanese garrison and labour troops, the primary task of the Americans was to get the airfield effective. When taken on 7th August it was merely cleared ground with a flat surface. It had to be lengthened by 1,000 feet, and operations station, fuelling facilities, and an air raid warning system established. On 12th August an amphibious Catalina made a trial landing, and five days later Admiral Ghormley was told by General Vandegrift that the field—named “Henderson” after a Marine flier, Major Lofton Henderson, who was killed at Midway—was ready for use in dry weather.

Air raid warning and Intelligence of the movements of the Japanese

<sup>8</sup> According to Navy Office records there was only one survivor (William Griffin, half caste) who arrived at Port Moresby on 28th August with Flight Lieutenant M. V. Mather, RAAF, and members of the crew of flying boat A18-11 which crashed while attempting to rescue survivors. RAAF survivors and Griffin landed at Fly Delta 10th August 1942.

on Guadalcanal was looked after by an Australian organisation, the only one on Guadalcanal, set up at Henderson Field a week after the original landing on 7th August. Lieut-Commander Mackenzie, Deputy Supervising Intelligence Officer, moved from Vila to Guadalcanal and established a coastwatcher base in a Japanese dug-out among coconut palms on the north-west edge of the airfield. Eventually to grow into a considerable organisation (always administered by Australian Naval Intelligence and commanded by an Australian naval officer, though including Australians, British, Americans, and New Zealanders, representatives of the Navy, Army, Air Force and Marines) it originally comprised Mackenzie, Lieutenant Train,<sup>9</sup> Mr R. Eedie, a civilian radio operator at Vila who volunteered to join the party and erect the radio, and Rayman, a New Ireland native. The day after they landed their radio was on the air and in contact with the coastwatchers both on Guadalcanal and farther afield. Three American Marine operators (Privates Page, Adams, and Berkstresser) were allotted to Mackenzie, trained by Eedie, and kept continuous watch. Thus reports of the movements of Japanese parties on Guadalcanal, signalled by Macfarlan from Gold Ridge, and by Rhoades from the western end of the island, were passed direct to Marine headquarters. From the east of Lunga, at Aola, District Officer Clemens, who had remained as a coastwatcher and had seen the landing, walked to Lunga, where he arrived a week after the landing, and told the Marines' Intelligence staff about the terrain to the eastward. He had 60 native police with him, with whom he carried out scouting work in the direction from which they had come, and proved their value in the battle of Tenaru River.

Soon after the departure of the transports and screening groups on 9th August, Guadalcanal was visited by surface forces. On 15th August four American transport destroyers ran in supplies of aviation petrol, bombs, and ammunition, and men to service the aircraft which were expected. That same day Allied Intelligence noted indications that a major Japanese striking force was being prepared for operations in the Solomons area "in the near future". Preliminary estimates were that it would comprise 4 battleships, 4 carriers, 11 heavy and 3 light cruisers, and 25 destroyers. *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* were mentioned as the main aircraft carriers, with *Ryujo* as another likely participant.

On the Allied side, Admiral Fletcher's Task Force 61—including *Saratoga*, *Enterprise*, and *Wasp*, with battleship *North Carolina*, cruisers and destroyers—since the withdrawal of surface forces from Savo Sound on 9th August had remained at sea in a retired position west of the New Hebrides. Admiral Crutchley, with Task Force 44—effective ships *Australia*, *Hobart*, and U.S. destroyers *Selfridge*, *Patterson* and *Bagley*—was in Noumea, where the ships victualled, ammunitioned and fuelled. (Victualing Stores Issue ship *Merkur*, escorted by the corvette *Mildura*,<sup>1</sup> and

<sup>9</sup> Lt G. H. C. Train, RANVR. Civil servant; of Solomon Is; b. Sydney, 4 Aug 1909. Killed in action 5 Mar 1943.

<sup>1</sup> HMAS *Mildura*, corvette (1941), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

Ammunition Issue Ship *Poyang* (2,873 tons), escorted by *Stuart*, arrived in Noumea from Australia to minister to the needs of the Australian ships.) On 18th August, at a conference between Ghormley, Turner, and Crutchley in Noumea, it was decided that for the time being Task Force 44 should remain in the South Pacific command; and at 6.30 next morning the five ships of the force sailed from Noumea and headed northwards to join Fletcher. At noon on the 21st, in position 250 miles south-east of Guadalcanal, they met the carrier forces and, less *Selfridge*, were assigned to Task Force 61—*Saratoga*, *Minneapolis*, *New Orleans*, and destroyers. Course was set to the north-west to reach a position 50 miles south of Guadalcanal at 7 a.m. on the 22nd. Crutchley was placed in command of the 4th Division (*Australia*, *Hobart*, *Phoenix*) of the Surface Attack Group, which included all the cruisers of the three carrier groups, the battleship *North Carolina*, and eight destroyers, under the command of Rear-Admiral Scott, U.S.N., in *San Juan*, and was charged with the defence of the carriers against surface attack.

While Task Force 61 was thus organised on the 21st, a land battle was fought on Guadalcanal, where a Japanese force made a determined attack on the right flank of the Marine defenders. The *XVII Army*, under General Hyakutake at Rabaul, was entrusted with the recapture of Guadalcanal. Hyakutake estimated that there were only 2,000 Americans on the island and that 6,000 troops would suffice for the operation. That number (with the New Guinea operation on his hands) was not immediately available. He sent what he could spare; 916 soldiers, commanded by Colonel K. Ichiki, embarked at Truk in six destroyers. The ships entered Savo Sound on the night of 18th August unseen from the shore, and landed their troops unopposed near Taivu Point, about 12 miles east of the eastern American perimeter at Koli Point. The previous day 500 men of the *5th Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force* landed at Tassafaronga, about ten miles west of the western American perimeter at Kukum. Ichiki planned to move westward along the coast and destroy the Americans by a surprise flank attack. But his presence was discovered by the Clemens party and some Marines, who ambushed a Japanese patrol on 19th August and identified them as newly landed troops. Consequently the Americans were ready for Ichiki's attack when it came in the early hours of the 21st at the mouth of the Tenaru River, three miles S.W. of Koli Point, where the Marines had dug in and established defences. In the battle, which lasted all day, Ichiki's force was virtually exterminated, and he himself committed suicide. The day previously, the 20th, the first combat aircraft landed on Henderson Field—19 Wildcat fighters and 12 Dauntless dive bombers, which were catapulted from the American escort carrier *Long Island*,<sup>2</sup> in a position some 210 miles away to the south-east of San Cristobal Island. In addition to the arrival of air forces on Guadalcanal, destroyers and store ships ran in supplies and technicians to the Marines

<sup>2</sup> *Long Island*, US escort carrier (1941), 7,886 tons, one 5-in, two 3-in guns, 21 aircraft, 16 kts.

there; and an advanced forwarding depot for this traffic was established at Espiritu Santo. In one of these sallies, on 22nd August, the destroyer *Blue* was torpedoed, and had to be scuttled next day. Simultaneously with the Americans running in supplies and men, the Japanese also were reinforcing and replenishing their forces on the island by night landings from destroyers staging from Faisi, in the Shortland Islands. It was a channel of reinforcement which became known to the Guadalcanal defenders as "the Tokyo Express".

Allied Intelligence regarding the enemy's naval striking force was sound. At daybreak on 23rd August, Task Force 61 was about 45 miles east of the south end of Malaita Island, and throughout the day operated between that position and another some 70 miles to the south-east. Coming down towards them from Truk was the Japanese force, in five main groups—first an advance force of six heavy cruisers and seaplane carrier *Chitose*; some distance astern a carrier striking force, *Zuikaku* and *Shokaku*, under Admiral Nagumo; slightly ahead of the carriers their surface defence force of two battleships and three heavy cruisers; a diversionary group, carrier *Ryujo* and cruiser *Tone*; and a reinforcement group of transports carrying 1,500 men, Naval Landing Force and Army, with a covering force, *Mikawa* in *Chokai*, with the three remaining cruisers of the 6th Cruiser Division. Between them the five groups disposed about 35 destroyers. The Japanese were aware of the presence of an American carrier force, and their basic strategy was to induce the enemy to concentrate air attack on the diversionary force while *Zuikaku*'s and *Shokaku*'s aircraft attacked the American carriers, and the troops were landed on Guadalcanal under cover of a heavy surface bombardment.

First contact was made with the Japanese at 10.30 a.m. on the 23rd when a reconnaissance aircraft sighted the transport group some 300 miles to the northward in the vicinity of Ontong Java. Striking forces were launched from *Saratoga* and from Henderson Field but failed to find the ships because the commander of the group, Rear-Admiral Tanaka, knowing that he had been sighted, had retired to the north-west. During the day the *Wasp* group retired to the southward to refuel.

At daylight on the 24th the *Saratoga* and *Enterprise* groups were about 50 miles east of the southern end of Malaita. At 9 a.m. reconnaissance aircraft from Ndeni, in the Santa Cruz Islands, sighted the Japanese diversionary group 220 miles north of Malaita. *Ryujo*, of that group, flew off a flight of 21 aircraft to attack Henderson Field, which they did in company with some land-based bombers from Rabaul. Only minor damage was done to the airfield, and the combined Japanese attackers lost 21 aircraft. Meanwhile other of the Japanese surface forces were sighted by reconnaissance and carrier search aircraft, including *Zuikaku* and *Shokaku*. During the afternoon both sides launched air striking forces, and at 3.50 p.m. one from *Saratoga* attacked *Ryujo* which, hit by bombs and torpedoes, sank four hours later. In the meantime the Japanese launched attack groups from both *Zuikaku* and *Shokaku* with the American carriers, each

operating independently of the other about ten miles apart as the centre of its respective task group, as their targets. The attack, concentrated on *Enterprise*, was made at about 4.30 p.m. and lasted some 15 minutes during which the carrier was hit by three bombs which caused considerable damage and had 74 killed and 95 wounded. This concluded the main action, and in the early evening Fletcher retired to the southward to a refuelling rendezvous. His air strength—with the loss of only 17 aircraft from all causes—was superior to that of the enemy, who had their air forces considerably reduced in the attack on *Enterprise*; but in gun power he was markedly inferior to the Japanese, and would have been ill advised to have invited a night surface action.

In subsidiary encounters, the seaplane carrier *Chitose* was damaged in an attack by two dive bombers from *Saratoga* in the late afternoon of the 24th, and during the night five of the destroyers from Tanaka's Transport Group bombarded the American positions on Guadalcanal. Itself unmolested throughout the 24th, the Transport Group, still making for Guadalcanal, was attacked in the forenoon of the 25th when about 120 miles north of its objective, by Marine dive bombers from the island. Tanaka's flagship, light cruiser *Jintsu*, received a direct hit which necessitated her retirement to Truk; the transport *Kinryu Maru* (9,310 tons) was set on fire and immobilised; and the destroyer *Mutsuki* was sunk whilst removing the transport's crew and troops. Tanaka was ordered from Rabaul to retire to the Shortlands, where the troops he was shepherding were re-embarked in fast destroyers for a night landing by "Tokyo Express" three days later—and by this means the Japanese reinforcement continued. In this reinforcement and replenishment of their respective forces both the Japanese and the Americans suffered losses. In an attempt to land troops on the night of 28th August four Japanese destroyers ran into trouble in Indispensable Strait (between Guadalcanal and Malaita) when they were attacked by Marine dive bombers. *Asagiri* blew up and sank, and the other three, two of which were badly damaged, had to return to Faisi with the surviving troops. On the 30th, destroyer *Yudachi* successfully landed troops at Taivu Point, Guadalcanal, and in a diversionary air attack to cover this landing the Japanese sank the American destroyer transport *Colhoun*,<sup>3</sup> with the loss of 51 of her crew.

For the last few days of August the American carrier groups patrolled the sea routes to the south-east of Guadalcanal. On the 25th *Enterprise* was detached to proceed for repair. On the 29th the *Saratoga* and *Wasp* groups were joined by Task Force 17—aircraft carrier *Hornet*, three cruisers, and destroyers. The day previously it was estimated from Allied Intelligence that there were at least ten Japanese submarines in the Solomon Islands area. "However, the carrier forces have an ample number of screening destroyers and strong anti-submarine air patrols which are maintained during daylight and have been keeping the submarines down

<sup>3</sup> *Colhoun*, US destroyer transport (converted 1940), 1,060 tons, four 4-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. Sunk by air attack, 30 Aug 1942.



and scoring some successes against them.”<sup>4</sup> The submarines, however, had their successes also. At 7.45 a.m. on the 31st, *Saratoga* was torpedoed by *I 26*. The big ship suffered little structural damage, but trouble caused in her electric propulsion units put her out of action for three months. That day the Japanese successfully landed 1,200 more troops, including Major-General Kiyotake Kawaguchi, who was charged with the capture of Henderson Field. That day, also, Task Force 44 was detached from Task Force 61, to revert to the operational control of Comsouwespac. Crutchley detached from the *Wasp* Task Group (to which Task Force 44 had been allocated the previous day) at 6 p.m., and the force (*Australia*, *Hobart*, *Phoenix*, *Selfridge*, *Patterson* and *Bagley*) reached Brisbane without incident in the afternoon of 3rd September.

In a brief review of the activities of Task Force 44 since it left Australia seven weeks earlier to take part in the Allied offensive in the Solomons, Admiral Crutchley commented on the lack of desirable efficiency of the Task Force “in surface action, day or night”. He attributed it to the denial (through convoy escorting duties) of time for weapon training.

Of the ships in the force (he wrote) only *Australia* has done target firing more recently than May, and it is believed that no ship has done a night target firing within the last eight months. *Phoenix*, who has just joined the Task Force, has not done a target firing since November 1941, and *Chicago* has not carried out a surface firing since October 1941. There have been no opportunities for destroyers to carry out torpedo practices and efforts to obtain a submarine target for destroyers to exercise anti-submarine tactics have been in vain because the U.S. submarines based at Brisbane were fully occupied in operational work. If we are to pursue a successful offensive, I am convinced that, whatever the cost, adequate periods MUST be set aside and proper facilities given for regular practices.

It was a matter to which Admiral Crutchley was to return more than once in the future.

## II

At the end of August 1942 came an echo from the Coral Sea Battle nearly four months earlier. It will be recalled that the Japanese operation—as part of the Coral Sea plan—to occupy Nauru and Ocean Islands, had to be postponed because of the loss of *Okinoshima*, the main ship in the expedition. Now, however, this delayed attack was carried out. In the forenoon of 23rd August Nauru was bombarded by a cruiser, and unopposed landings were made there, and on Ocean Island, on the 26th.<sup>5</sup> That same day the enemy made another move towards his postponed sea-borne invasion of Port Moresby, with an invasion of Milne Bay. On 24th

<sup>4</sup> Rear-Admiral Crutchley, “Narrative of Events subsequent to the withdrawal to Noumea of the Amphibious Force after the capture and occupation of Tulagi, Guadalcanal”, from which, together with Morison, Vol V, pp. 79-113, much has been derived for writing of this period of the history.

<sup>5</sup> There were seven Europeans on Nauru—the Administrator, Lt-Col F. R. Chalmers; Dr B. H. Quin, the Medical Officer, and his assistant, W. Shugg; two members of the Phosphate Commission staff, F. F. Harmer and W. H. Doyle; and two missionaries, Fathers Kayser and Clivaz. The two missionaries were taken to Truk, where Kayser died of his privations. The other five were murdered by the Japanese on Nauru on 26th March 1943. Only Clivaz survived. The six Europeans on Ocean Island were also murdered by the invaders.

According to the diary of a Chinese interpreter, the bombardment of Nauru was carried out by two Japanese cruisers on the night of 23rd-24th August, commencing at 11.45 p.m.

August—when Milne Bay experienced its third air raid, by 13 Zero fighters—a coastwatcher at Porlock Harbour on the north coast of New Guinea, some 130 miles north-west of the head of Milne Bay, reported seven barges moving east, to put in at Fona, a few miles east of Porlock. Carrying 1,318 troops of the *5th Sasebo Special Naval Landing Force* from Buna (as it was subsequently learned)<sup>6</sup> the intention was to make a flank attack on Milne Bay from the north. The air attack on Milne Bay prevented Allied aircraft there from attacking these barges, which apparently crossed over to Goodenough Island during the night, and landed their troops there. The barges were reported by a coastwatcher at Cape Varieta, on Goodenough Island, and they were later destroyed by Allied fighter aircraft, leaving their troops marooned on the island.

Meanwhile, also on the 24th, another Japanese force left Rabaul for Milne Bay—Matsuyama's *18th Cruiser Division*, *Tenryu* and *Tatsuta*, destroyers *Tankikaze*, *Urakaze* and *Hamakaze*, *Submarine Chasers No. 22* and *No. 24*,<sup>7</sup> and transports *Kinai Maru* and *Nankai Maru*, a total of nine ships, with 1,171 men of the *5th Kure* and *5th Sasebo Special Naval Landing Forces*, and the *16th Naval Pioneer Unit*—these landing forces commanded by Commander Seijiro Hayashi. The force was sighted by a reconnaissance aircraft at 8.30 a.m. on the 25th about 15 miles east of Kitava Island (some 100 miles N.N.E. of Milne Bay) and was also reported by a coastwatcher on Kitava. Though shadowed through a large part of the day, and its destination clearly established, bad weather prevented any decisive air attack, but Japanese reports state that some 20 Marines were killed and wounded when the force was attacked by fighter aircraft 55 miles N.E. of Samarai in the afternoon of the 25th.

Present in Milne Bay at this time was H.M.A.S. *Arunta* (Commander J. C. Morrow) with the transport *Tasman*<sup>8</sup> which she was escorting, and which was discharging at Gili Gili jetty. Both ships were ordered to Port Moresby, where they arrived next afternoon. There was, at that time, no naval base or staff at Milne Bay. With the approach of the enemy convoy, Major-General Clowes<sup>9</sup> assumed active command of all Allied land and air forces in the area. Naval representation was a beachmaster—first Lieut-Commander C. J. Stephenson and then, succeeding him just at this time, on 24th August, Lieut-Commander Andrewartha.<sup>1</sup> No naval defence existed with the departure of *Arunta*, and arrangements were made to patrol

<sup>6</sup> Eastern New Guinea Invasion Operations, Japanese Monograph No. 96, from which much of the Japanese side of this campaign is derived.

<sup>7</sup> Each of 300 tons. *No. 22* sunk off Kavieng, 19 Feb 1944; *No. 24* in Carolines, 17 Feb 1944.

<sup>8</sup> As in the campaigns in Greece and Crete—and under very similar conditions—Dutch merchant ships did fine service at this stage of the war in north-eastern Australian and New Guinea waters. Among those engaged in transporting troops and materials to New Guinea at this period were *Tasman*, *Both*, *Bontekoe*, *Karsik*, *Swartenhondt*, *'s Jacob*, *Bantam*, and *Van Heemskerck*.

<sup>9</sup> Lt-Gen C. A. Clowes, CBE, DSO, MC. Comd I Corps Artillery 1940-41, Milne Force 1942; GOC 11 Div 1942-43, Vic L of C Area 1943-45. Regular soldier; b. Warwick, Qld, 11 Mar 1892. Died 19 May 1968.

<sup>1</sup> Cdr E. M. Andrewartha, VRD; RANR. Comd HMAS *Goonambee* 1940-42; NOIC Milne Bay 1942-43; Comd HMAS's *Coombar* 1943-44 and *Burnie* 1944-45. Factory manager; of Burwood, Vic; b. Hobart, 16 Dec 1904.

the bay with the R.A.A.F. tender to give early warning of the entrance of hostile ships. Just after midnight on the 25th the crew of the tender reported that they had sighted four ships in the bay at 11.40 p.m., eleven miles east of Gili Gili jetty. Heavy gunfire was heard in the bay at 2 a.m. on the 26th, and again at 5.30 a.m. It was assumed by the defenders that this was anti-aircraft fire from the ships, which discharged their troops from about 1.45 a.m. at Ahioma—where they had been seen by the R.A.A.F. tender and were attacked by Allied aircraft, *Nankai Maru* being badly damaged.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the night the Japanese troops on shore tried to work to the westward against the opposition of Australian troops. With the dawn the enemy ships, attacked from the air, left the bay. Allied aircraft attacked the landing place, destroyed barges on the beach, and petrol and stores dumps.

This initiated a period of conditions which, because of the similar circumstances, existed in both the Milne Bay and southern Solomons areas—Allied ships operating by day, the Japanese by night. Of the southern Solomons at this time, the American naval historian wrote:

A curious tactical situation had developed at Guadalcanal; a virtual exchange of sea mastery every twelve hours. The Americans ruled the waves from sunup to sundown; big ships discharged cargoes, smaller ships dashed through the Sound, "Yippies" [district patrol vessels] and landing craft ran errands between Lunga Point and Tulagi. But as . . . night fell on Ironbottom Sound, Allied ships cleared out like frightened children running home from a graveyard; transport and combat types steamed through Sealark Channel while small craft holed up in Tulagi Harbour or behind Gavutu. Then the Japanese took over. The "Tokyo Express" of troop destroyers and light cruisers dashed in to discharge soldiers or freight, and, departing, tossed a few shells in the Marines' direction. But the Rising Sun flag never stayed to greet its namesake; by dawn the Japs were well away, and then the Stars and Stripes reappeared.<sup>3</sup>

It was a pattern which was duplicated with slight variations in Milne Bay, a pattern dictated by the existence of the Allied airfields and air forces at Guadalcanal, and at Milne Bay and Moresby. The variations lay in the fact that, though Allied naval forces were below requirements in the south Solomon's area, they were practically non-existent in the Milne Bay area, particularly the fast small ships needed for quick in-and-out runs with reinforcements and supplies. The only naval vessel of any consequence available at the time was *Arunta*, and she, back in Moresby with *Tasman* in the afternoon of the 26th, was directed by Comsouwespac (Admiral Leary) to remain there temporarily as anti-submarine protection for shipping in the port.

In the early hours of the 27th another enemy force—the destroyers *Arashi*, *Yayoi*, and *Murakumo*, and three patrol vessels, carrying 775 troops of the 3rd *Kure* and the 5th *Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Forces*, and escorted by *Tenryu* and the 17th *Destroyer Division*—entered

<sup>2</sup> General Clowes subsequently reported that the transport *Nankai Maru* was sunk in the bay by Allied aircraft and that "one P.O.W. stated that 300 men had been lost with the ship". (D. McCarthy, *South-West Pacific Area—First Year* (1959), p. 185, in the Army series of this history.)

<sup>3</sup> Morison, Vol V, pp. 113-14.

Milne Bay. The landing forces were under the command of Captain Minoru Yano. The presence of the ships was made evident by the sounds of gunfire and of movement on the waters in the vicinity of Ahioma, but rain and mist curtailed off the landing activities from the defenders, who were uncertain of what exactly had transpired in the darkness. This condition of uncertainty regarding enemy naval activities, and whether reinforcements were being brought in or, on the contrary, troops already landed were being withdrawn, persisted. On the 28th General MacArthur's headquarters directed that *Tasman*, under the escort of *Arunta*, was to return to Milne Bay from Moresby. The Allied air forces were to provide the necessary reconnaissance and cover for this move. The N.O.I.C. Port Moresby (Commander Hunt) replied, however, that evening, that the G.O.C. New Guinea Force (General Rowell<sup>4</sup>) considered the situation too obscure to warrant this move, and that the ships would be retained at Moresby pending clarification of the situation, or further orders. Enemy ships were again in Milne Bay during the night of the 28th-29th, and on the 29th Brigadier-General S. J. Chamberlin, MacArthur's Chief Operations Officer, issued instructions to Captain J. Carson, U.S.N., Operations Officer of the Allied Naval Forces, to get merchant ships into Milne Bay at the earliest practicable date as decided by local authority, and meanwhile to send *Arunta* there to support the defences.

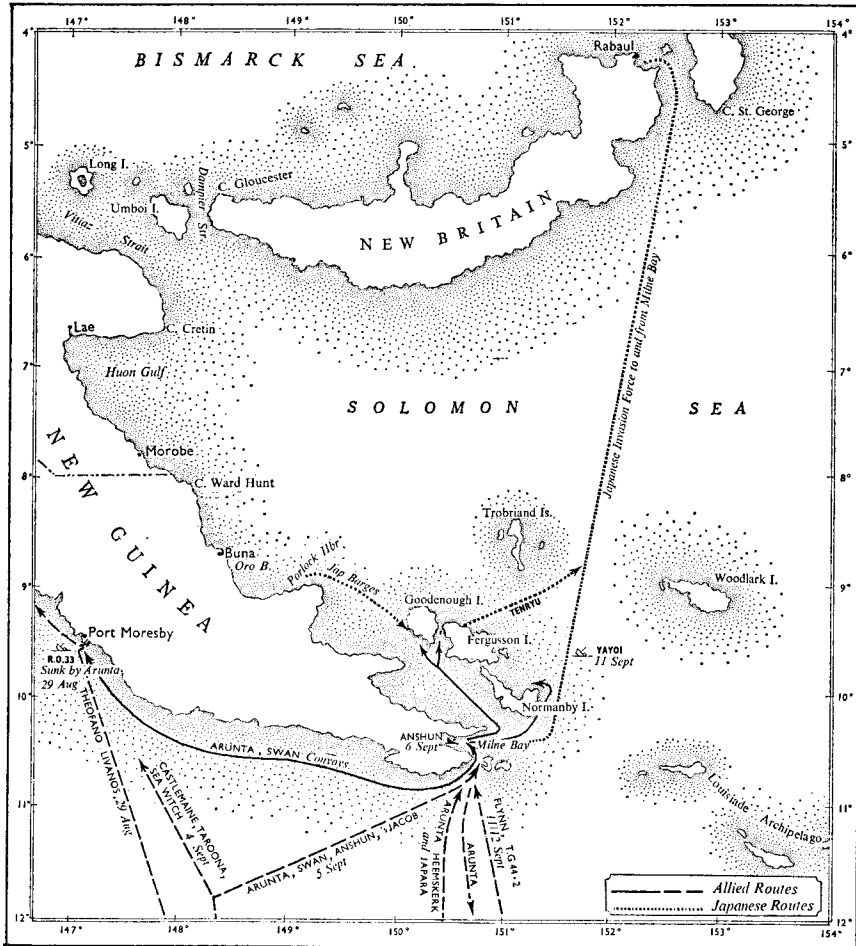
*Arunta* at this time, however, had a job on her hands at Moresby. At 11.15 a.m. on 29th August the Burns Philp motor vessel *Malaita* which had arrived six days before with troops and supplies sailed for Cairns. *Arunta*, who was to escort her clear, followed her out through Basilisk Passage and then took station ahead, zigzagging across the merchant ship's bows. She was only on the second leg of her zigzag when *Malaita* was struck by a torpedo just forward of the bridge on the starboard side. Weather was fine, with a smooth sea and light airs, and *Malaita*, though she at once took a 10-degree list to starboard and increased her forward draft from 8 feet to 24 feet, remained afloat. She was towed stern first by the Burns Philp small *Matafele* and H.M.A.S. *Potrero*<sup>5</sup> (Warrant Officer Bennetts<sup>6</sup>) and anchored in the lee of Manuabada Island. *Arunta* meanwhile secured an asdic contact on what was believed to be the enemy submarine, and over a period of one-and-a-half hours, from 1 p.m. to 2.30, carried out a series of four depth-charge attacks. Evidence, continuing over some days, of oil and oil bubbles rising in the position of these attacks convinced Morrow that a submarine had been destroyed. It was subsequently verified that this was so, and that *Arunta*'s victim was *RO 33*. Consequent on this torpedoing, N.O.I.C. Port Moresby diverted an incoming Greek ship, *Theofano Livanos* (4,815 tons), to Hall Sound, about

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Gen Sir Sydney Rowell, KBE, CB. BGS I Aust Corps 1940-41; GOC I Aust Corps and NGF 1942; Dir Tactical Investigation, War Office, 1943-46; CGS 1950-54. Regular soldier; b. Lockleys, SA, 15 Dec 1894.

<sup>5</sup> HMAS *Potrero*, store ship (1942), 68 tons.

<sup>6</sup> CWO J. R. Bennetts; RANR. (1st AIF: 18 Bn.) HMAS *Korowa*; comd HMAS's *Potrero* 1942-43, *Waree* 1943-44 and 1944-46. Explosives factory employee; of Stockton, NSW; b. Liverpool, England, 29 Oct 1894.

50 miles north-west of Moresby. The next day *Arunta*, after helping *Matafele* and *Potrero* to tow *Malaita* to a shallow water anchorage, escorted *Theofano Livanos* from Hall Sound to Moresby, where the two ships arrived at 4 p.m.



Milne Bay, 24th August-26th October 1942

In the afternoon of the 29th, Allied reconnaissance aircraft reported a cruiser and nine destroyers approaching Milne Bay from the north, and enemy ships were again in the bay that night, their activities shrouded in darkness but including some gunfire which, however, did no damage to the defenders. There was a brief pause, then, in the "hide and seek" game with the Japanese ships in their nocturnal visits, and on shore the

situation improved greatly for the defenders. During the night of 30th-31st August a determined Japanese attack on No. 3 airstrip was smashed with heavy losses to the attackers, and the Australians drove eastwards during the 31st, and by 5 p.m. had cleared out most of the enemy as far as the K.B. Mission, to the east of Swinger Bay.

As a result of this improvement in the Milne Bay situation, it was decided to sail *Tasman* there, escorted by *Arunta*, and the two ships left Port Moresby on the morning of 31st August. Next morning, when they were in China Strait, air reconnaissance reported two cruisers or destroyers east of the Trobriand Islands apparently heading for Milne Bay, and Comsouwespac ordered *Arunta* and her charge to remain south of China Strait until the situation was clarified. There was no evidence of a Japanese surface visitation at Milne Bay that night, and on 2nd September—on which day *Arunta* and *Tasman* arrived there—General Rowell's chief staff officer, Brigadier Hopkins,<sup>7</sup> told MacArthur's headquarters, Brisbane, that Rowell indicated "that patrol activity discloses only small scattered enemy forces have been found in the vicinity of Milne Bay. He considers it safe, as far as Army is concerned, to put ships into Milne Bay." Hopkins added that there were approximately only 20 days' rations there, and that every effort should be made to clear ships in as fast as possible. Comsouwespac was accordingly asked to expedite movements of ships into Milne Bay. But the continued presence of Japanese ships in the north-eastern approaches to the bay, and concern that they might enter on the night of the 2nd (which they did, though there was no gunfire, only ship to shore communication whose purpose was unknown to the Australians, though it was apparently embarkation of wounded) caused the withdrawal again of *Arunta* and *Tasman* to Moresby, where they arrived on 3rd September.

That day the Australians on shore, continuing their mopping up operations and penetration to the eastward, reached Sanderson Bay, some four miles east of No. 3 Strip. The Japanese, who were now in bad straits, were told in a signal from Rear-Admiral Matsuyama, *18th Cruiser Division*, to build their camps and defences in the mountains as soon as they could be made secure, and then try to continue communications and tell him where they were. He promised them reinforcements about 12th September. Later communications between him and the Japanese Milne Bay force indicated that reinforcements of 200 men would land on the night of the 5th, and that a naval landing party of two battalions would be put on shore on the night of the 10th.<sup>8</sup>

By this time, however, Japanese plans had been revised. It was learned after the war that on 31st August the high command determined to give priority to the recapture of Guadalcanal. They thus decided, in the face of the setback they had there received, to abandon the attempt to capture Milne Bay as a staging point for a seaborne attack on Port Moresby.

<sup>7</sup> Maj-Gen R. N. L. Hopkins, CBE. GSO1 1 Armd Div 1941-42; DMO LHQ 1942; BGS HQ NGF 1942-43; LO between LHQ and VII Amphibious Force US Navy 1943-44. Regular soldier; b. Stawell, Vic, 24 May 1897.

<sup>8</sup> From Japanese documents captured at Milne Bay. GHQ (Brisbane) Journal, 4 Sept 1942.

So, soon after sending the above signal, Matsuyama cancelled it with one to the effect that it was expected to withdraw all Japanese forces by *Tenryu* and two destroyers, which would arrive at 8.30 p.m. on the 5th.

### III

On Friday, 4th September, Admiral Crutchley with Task Force 44 arrived at Brisbane. On the same day, the problems of South-West Pacific and South Pacific were talked over by representatives of both area commands on board Admiral Ghormley's flagship in Noumea Harbour. Among senior officers present were Admirals Nimitz, Ghormley, and Turner; General H. H. Arnold, head of the U.S. Army Air Force; and Generals Sutherland and Kenney, respectively MacArthur's Chief of Staff and Air Commander. MacArthur, apprehensive of another "Coral Sea" attempt on Moresby, wanted the Pacific Fleet deployed to meet any such threat, but Nimitz considered that the Japanese would not try such a move, and in any case he needed all he could get to counter enemy moves against Guadalcanal. MacArthur had to be content with Task Force 44 for the time being. He already planned to make immediate use of it, and, also on 4th September, ordered Comsouwespac to dispatch all available surface and submarine forces urgently to the vicinity of Milne Bay to prevent further Japanese reinforcement of Milne Bay, to clear enemy naval forces from the general area east and north-east of the bay, and to cover supply of the Milne Bay garrison. Moves towards that supply were also initiated on the 4th, when *Arunta* left Moresby to join H.M.A.S. *Swan* (Commander G. C. Oldham) escorting the merchant ships *Anshun* (3,188 tons) and 's *Jacob* from Townsville to Milne Bay.

And, in these first four days of September 1942, events presaged the swinging over to large-scale offensive operations of the Allied forces in the South-West Pacific. On 1st September, the Combined Operations School, H.M.A.S. *Assault*, was commissioned at Port Stephens, just north of Newcastle, New South Wales; and on the 4th, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, authorised the formation of what was to become famous as Rear-Admiral Daniel E. Barbey's VII Amphibious Force.

In the evening of 2nd September H.M.A. Ships *Swan* and *Castlemaine*<sup>9</sup> (Lieut-Commander Sullivan<sup>1</sup>) left Townsville escorting convoy "P2"—*Sea Witch* and *Taroona* (4,286 tons)—and convoy "Q2"—*Anshun* and 's *Jacob*. In the late afternoon of the 4th, some 180 miles south of Port Moresby, they were joined by *Arunta*, and soon after the convoys split, "P2", escorted by *Castlemaine*, proceeded to Moresby, and the other two ships, destined for Milne Bay, made for there escorted by *Arunta* and *Swan*. On the 5th, *Arunta* was told by signal from Comsouwespacfor to hold the convoy south of China Strait, as Japanese ships were expected in Milne Bay that night, but to take *Anshun* into the bay next morning, leaving

<sup>9</sup> HMAS *Castlemaine*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>1</sup> Lt-Cdr P. J. Sullivan, VRD; RANR. Comd HMAS's *Adele* 1939-42, *Castlemaine* 1942-44, *Goulburn* 1945. Master mariner and law student; of Mosman, NSW; b. Sydney, 10 Aug 1897.

*Swan* and 's *Jacob* south of China Strait until further orders. *Arunta* and *Anshun* entered Milne Bay in the morning of the 6th (as did the hospital ship *Manunda*) and *Anshun* berthed alongside, port side to, at Gili Gili pontoon jetty at 8.30, disembarked troops and commenced unloading. Her engines were kept at "Stand By", and sea watches were maintained against an emergency. The day before, Morrow had told *Anshun*'s master, Captain W. Miller, that *Arunta* would escort him to sea at about 4 p.m. on the 6th, but Miller now received verbal orders from local authorities to continue discharging until completed.<sup>2</sup> *Arunta* did not remain in Milne Bay, as Morrow considered his responsibility was to screen 's *Jacob* and *Swan*, and therefore went to sea about 3 p.m. and spent the night with them south of China Strait.

In Milne Bay, where the weather was light southerly winds and continuous heavy rains, with variable visibility, *Anshun* continued discharging after dark by the light of her own cargo clusters. Just after 10 p.m. she came under fire from a cruiser at a range of one-and-a-half to two miles. Communications between bridge and engine room failed, and the ship's lights continued burning for two minutes or so before a messenger could get down with orders to pull the main switches. The enemy cruiser, firing on an approximately stationary bearing across Laulau Island, then illuminated by searchlight. *Anshun*'s guns were manned, but received direct hits when the enemy started firing, and were not fired. *Anshun* received about ten hits, quickly settled by the head, and slowly capsized to starboard and settled on her beam ends. Her casualties were all of guns' crews—two American gunners killed and one wounded, and one of the ship's company (gun's crew) wounded. There were two Japanese ships in the bay that night—*Tenryu* and destroyer *Arashi*—and they also shelled Australian shore positions at Gili Gili and Waga Waga, causing some casualties. *Manunda*, wearing her hospital colours and lights, was illuminated by Japanese searchlights, but not molested.

*Arunta*, when she returned to Milne Bay in the early morning of the 7th,

discovered (recorded Morrow), that large enemy forces had entered Milne Bay during the night and had sunk s.s. *Anshun* by gunfire alongside the wharf. I proceeded to inform *Swan* and ordered him to proceed with 's *Jacob* to Port Moresby. At 11 a.m. I returned to Milne Bay, embarked the survivors from *Anshun*, and proceeded to Townsville at 4.25 p.m.

*Swan*, in the meantime, took 's *Jacob* to Moresby. Some seven hours after leaving China Strait, Oldham received a signal from Comsouwespacfor to both *Arunta* and *Swan*, who were apparently presumed to be in Milne Bay with 's *Jacob*, telling them to clear with all vessels via China Strait, as Japanese ships were expected in Milne Bay that night, but to return to Milne Bay at first light on the 8th with 's *Jacob*.

This message (Oldham recorded), indicated clearly to me that the Commander South-West Pacific Force had not yet been fully informed of the situation at Fall

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<sup>2</sup> Captain Miller's report, 9 Sept 1942.



River [code name for Milne Bay]. *Swan* was then approximately 55 miles west of Brumer Island and it was estimated that *Arunta* was 50-60 miles south of China Strait proceeding to Townsville. A return to China Strait area involving a wait of five days [Milne Bay's estimate of time before discharging berth would be available] would expose 's *Jacob* to risks which could otherwise be avoided.

Oldham therefore decided to continue to Port Moresby, where he arrived with his charge next afternoon. Fulfilling expectations, Japanese ships again entered Milne Bay on the night of the 7th, and shelled the Gili Gili wharf area and the vicinity of No. 1 Strip, causing some casualties. And, as on the previous night, *Manunda*, still there, was illuminated by searchlight, but not otherwise troubled.

The obstacle presented by these Japanese incursions into Milne Bay against the nurture of the Australian forces there by means of lightly escorted convoys, and the Intelligence MacArthur had of a possible large-scale Japanese reinforcement of their forces on 12th September, led to his instructions to Leary on 4th September to use all available naval forces to cover the convoys and prevent enemy reinforcement. Next day Crutchley, in Brisbane, was told by Leary that Task Force 44 would proceed at earliest date on these missions. "I had already given consideration," Crutchley later wrote in his Letter of Proceedings covering the period,

to the possible use of Task Force 44 for this task, and on 30th August I had asked Admiral Fletcher (who commanded the combined Carrier Task Forces to which Task Force 44 was at that date attached) if he could release *Hobart*, *Phoenix* and destroyers so that I could suggest their employment in this connection.

#### IV

Crutchley, with *Australia*, *Phoenix*, *Selfridge* and *Bagley*, sailed from Brisbane on 7th September, with Captain Clay, Torres Strait pilot, embarked as pilot in *Selfridge*. "Circumstances had combined to take *Hobart* and *Patterson* [both undergoing repair] from my force at a time when I most needed destroyers, and *Hobart* to support them," Crutchley later wrote. But Ghormley released *Henley* and *Helm* from the South Pacific, and they joined Crutchley in the Coral Sea about 300 miles south of Port Moresby at daylight on the 10th. In his operational order, Crutchley stated his intention to operate in an area approximately 200 miles square, whose northern boundary was 150 miles south of Port Moresby, "and generally in the afternoon will be in the north-eastern part of this area". For the purposes of the operation he organised Task Force 44 into two groups: T.G. 44.1, *Australia*, *Phoenix*, *Hobart* (when she joined); and T.G. 44.2, under Comdesron 4, Captain Cornelius W. Flynn, U.S.N., in *Selfridge*, comprising that ship, *Bagley*, *Henley*, *Helm*, and *Patterson* (when she joined).

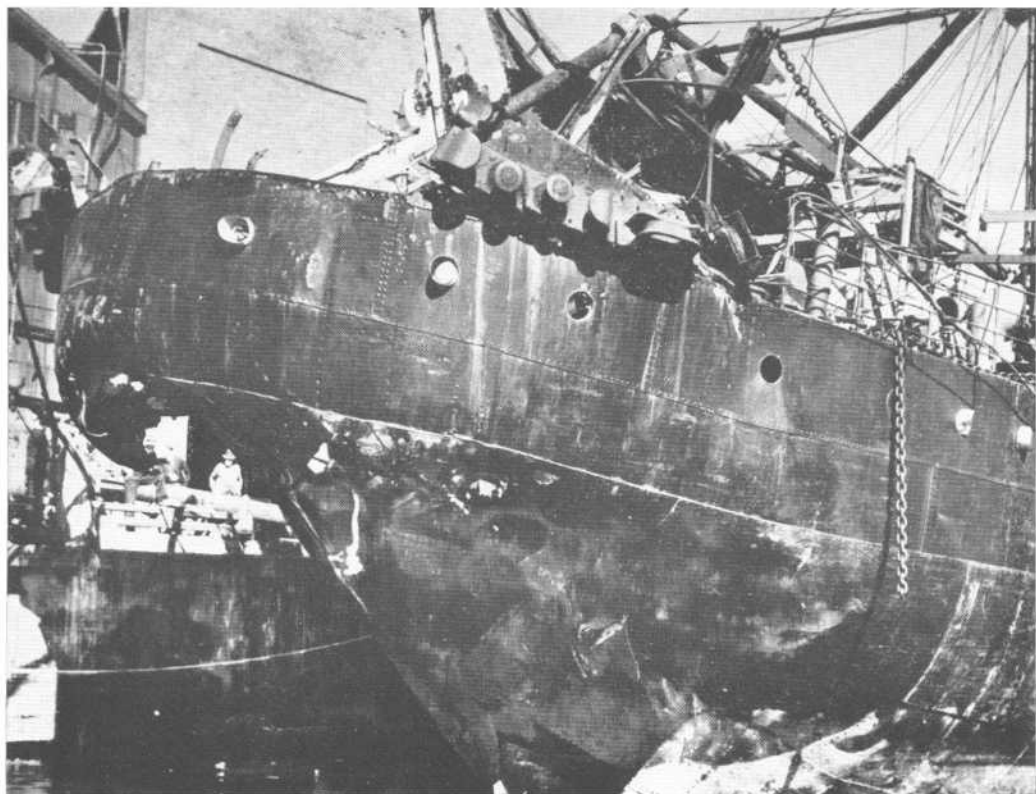
Throughout 10th September Task Force 44 patrolled without incident. Approaching from the south for Milne Bay, where they were due on the evening of the 11th, were *Arunta* (which left Townsville on the 9th) and transports *Van Heemskerk* and *Japara* (9,312 tons). In the early after-

noon of the 11th Crutchley received an air reconnaissance report of two Japanese destroyers east of the Trobriand Islands at noon, steering south-west. Anticipating their entry into Milne Bay ("and it now appeared that we would have *Arunta* and two merchantmen in the bay when these ships arrived"), Crutchley ordered Captain Flynn to take *Selfridge*, *Henley*, *Bagley* and *Helm* to try to intercept, but to withdraw by early dawn if he had entered Milne Bay and made no contact with the enemy. Crutchley himself stood to the northward in support, and turned toward China Strait on receipt of a reported sighting of a Japanese cruiser headed for Milne Bay. A subsequent report of an Allied air attack disabling one enemy made Crutchley confident that Flynn could deal successfully with one possible enemy cruiser and one destroyer, and that his support was not needed. He accordingly turned to the southward to meet *Hobart*, now hastening north to join him.

Flynn's mission was uneventful. On rejoining Crutchley at 4 p.m. on the 12th, he reported having entered Milne Bay just before the previous midnight, swept westward as far as Waga Waga, and then patrolled east and west between there and the entrance to the bay throughout the night. (Captain Clay's services as pilot, reported Flynn, were "invaluable".) No enemy was sighted. He cleared China Strait at 6.15 a.m. on the 12th, after seeing *Arunta*, with *Van Heemskerk* and *Japara*, enter the bay about 6 a.m.

Though Flynn's mission was fruitless, the enemy destroyers, whose presence east of the Trobriands in the afternoon of the 11th led to that mission, fell victims to Allied air attack. As was subsequently learned, a proportion of the sightings in the vicinity during this period was of enemy destroyers seeking to lift the Japanese troops marooned on Goodenough Island. Those sighted on the 11th engaged on this operation were *Yayoi* and *Isokaze*. At 4.17 p.m. they were attacked, when 27 miles north-east of the north-easterly point of Normanby Island, by five Flying Fortress bombers. A direct hit on *Yayoi*'s stern set her on fire, and she later sank. *Isokaze*, though near-missed, escaped. Survivors from *Yayoi* now assumed on Normanby Island the role of those they had sought to rescue from similar straits on Goodenough. Because their undisputed presence on Normanby Island was considered to be detrimental to Australian prestige among the natives there it was decided to move against them.

On 15th September *Van Heemskerk* and *Japara*, having completed discharging in Milne Bay, sailed for Townsville escorted by *Arunta* and *Stuart* (Commander S. H. K. Spurgeon). The old 10th Flotilla leader had arrived with a convoy that day. She detached to rendezvous at 5 p.m. on the 16th, 200 miles south of Moresby, with a northbound convoy of five ships escorted by H.M.A. Ships *Ballarat* and *Bendigo*. Soon after meeting, the convoys split, and *Stuart* escorted *Van Heutsz*, *West Cactus* (5,581 tons) and *Hanyang* (2,876 tons) to Milne Bay, while the corvettes took the other two ships to Moresby. *Stuart* and her convoy reached Milne Bay about midnight on the 17th, and the next morning Spurgeon was told



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

The Australian steamer *Allara*, damaged in a submarine torpedo attack, 23rd July 1942.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

*Anshun* capsized at Milne Bay, 6th September 1942.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

H.M.A.S. *Norman* leaving Capetown.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

*Voyager* ashore at Betano, Timor.

by Colonel Litchfield,<sup>3</sup> of General Clowes' staff, that it was desired to land a company on Normanby Island to secure approximately 80 unarmed survivors from *Yayoi*. It was agreed that *Stuart* would take part in this operation. She made a hurried trip to Moresby to fuel; *Bendigo* (Lieutenant Griffith<sup>4</sup>) from that port went to Milne Bay to take over *Stuart's* anti-submarine responsibilities; and by noon on Sunday, 20th September, *Stuart* was back in Milne Bay completing preparations for the operation.

Because *Stuart* had none but small-scale charts of the vicinity, Spurgeon sought—and received—navigational information from those with local knowledge, and early next morning himself made an aerial survey in an R.A.A.F. Hudson aircraft of the landing beach on Normanby Island, of the reef, and of the shores of Normanby, Fergusson, and Goodenough Islands. Troops under Captain Brocksopp<sup>5</sup> of the 2/10th Battalion, embarked in *Stuart* at Milne Bay that evening, and, with a local pilot on board, she moved down the bay and anchored at the entrance, whence she sailed at 1 a.m. on the 22nd for Cape Pierson, Normanby Island, where she arrived at 6.30 a.m. The island here is steep to, with over 100 fathoms within one cable of the shore, and *Stuart* had to anchor in 25 fathoms so close to that there was insufficient swinging room, and she had to be manoeuvred stern to current (about two knots) with main engines. "This," remarked Spurgeon, "did not facilitate disembarkation or re-embarkation of troops." She landed a beach party of one officer and four ratings (they remained on shore until completion of re-embarkation), disembarked her troops in luggers, and returned to Milne Bay, where she arrived about midday. She returned to Normanby Island next day, and arrived on the west side of Cape Pierson at 4 p.m. on the 23rd. She re-embarked the troops, plus eight Japanese prisoners, and was back in Milne Bay by 9 p.m.

On Normanby Island the Australians were unable to locate the main body of the Japanese. During the night of the 22nd, while *Stuart* was absent in Milne Bay, two Japanese ships—the soldiers on shore believed them to be a destroyer and small escort vessel—were seen about a mile out to sea, signalling to the beach by morse lamp. Subsequently they swept the beach with searchlights. "It is felt," recorded Spurgeon in his report, "that this may possibly have been a submarine." That possibility is underlined by the fact that the Japanese used submarines to rescue the troops marooned on Goodenough Island. Spurgeon remarked also on the conduct of the eight Japanese prisoners, which, while they were

on board was strange. They would cry like children when being attended. They ate ravenously to start with but later went off their food. They appeared utterly helpless. . . . It is considered gratifying and encouraging to observe the utter lack of initiative and helplessness displayed by the prisoners in these circumstances.

<sup>3</sup> Col J. C. D. Litchfield. HQ Milne Force; HQ 11 Div. Public accountant; of Potts Point, NSW; b. Williamstown, Vic, 8 Sep 1896.

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Cdr S. J. Griffith; RANR. Comd HMAS's *Bendigo* 1941-43, *Stawell* 1943-46. Master mariner; of Brighton, Vic; b. Moonee Ponds, Vic, 4 Oct 1899.

<sup>5</sup> Maj J. E. Brocksopp; 2/10 Bn. Solicitor; of Adelaide; b. London, 4 Jul 1913.

## V

On the day that *Stuart* sailed from Milne Bay with Australian troops for Normanby Island, some 1,200 miles to the westward, her former companion of old 10th Flotilla days in the Mediterranean—H.M.A.S. *Voyager*—sailed from Darwin with Australian troops for Timor, on what was destined to be her last voyage. As stated earlier in this work,<sup>6</sup> on 10th December 1941 the transport *Zealandia*, escorted by *Westralia*, the ships carrying between them 1,402 A.I.F. officers and men of "Sparrow Force", had sailed from Darwin for Koepang, Timor. On 20th February 1942, a Japanese force invaded the island and the Dutch and Australian defenders at Koepang capitulated on 23rd February. Thereafter there was in Australia no word of the fate of Sparrow Force until 20th April 1942, when faint wireless messages were heard in Darwin. These came from the remnants of Sparrow Force, and the 2/2nd Independent Company, a total of some 470 Australians who, with about 200 Dutch, were carrying on guerilla warfare against the occupying Japanese. Once the bona fides of the Australians were established, the mainland authorities set about filling their immediate needs and ministering to the future. Physical contact was first established by air, with drops of supplies, and later (24th May) with a Catalina aircraft which landed and took to the mainland the Australian and Dutch commanders, and three wounded and four sick men. Meanwhile, MacArthur's headquarters had decided on the immediate future of the Australian Timor Force. It was to remain to cover, in conjunction with the Dutch force, possible airfield sites at Suai and Beco on the south coast, and on the Salazar Plateau; to harass and sabotage Japanese positions and facilities; and to furnish Intelligence. Only if its safety was endangered by Japanese determination and persistence would the force be withdrawn. The force would be supplied and equipped through naval sea communications, with Suai, Betano and Beco developed as supply points. All unfit members would be withdrawn.

The Navy was instructed to obtain information concerning beach and loading facilities; to plan for the carriage of 40 tons of supplies monthly; to be prepared for complete withdrawal at 10 days' notice if necessary; to prepare for insertion of a relief force and withdrawal of the relieved, the first stage to cover the withdrawal of 10 officers and 34 other ranks.

The first naval run to Timor from Darwin was made at the end of May by H.M.A.S. *Kuru*, a former Northern Territory patrol vessel, which was requisitioned as a naval tender in Darwin in December 1941. A wooden vessel of 55 tons, 776 feet long, she was motor driven, capable of nine knots, and armed with an oerlikon gun on the forecastle, twin .5-inch machine-guns amidships, and two .303 machine-guns and depth-charges aft. With a ship's company of 21, her commanding officer on her initial and immediately succeeding Timor runs was Lieutenant Joel.<sup>7</sup> On

<sup>6</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-42*, pp. 487, 596.

<sup>7</sup> Lt J. Joel; RANVR. Comd HMAS's *Coongoola* and *Kuru*. Public relations executive; of Randwick, NSW; b. Sydney, 20 Apr 1915.

that initial run *Kuru* left Darwin, reached Betano and was back in Darwin on the 29th. The signal from N.O.I.C. Darwin to the Naval Board epitomised the story of the voyage: "1106Z/29. D.N.O.N.T. to A.C.N.B. 328 (R) Comsouwespac. Operation Hamburger. *Kuru* trip successfully completed. No difficulty. No enemy sightings."

*Kuru* left Darwin on her second Timor trip on Sunday, 31st May, and arrived back in Darwin in the afternoon of 4th June. Lieutenant Joel's instructions for that trip outline the procedure that was followed on subsequent trips during the Timor series:

Being in all respects ready for sea and to engage the enemy and having embarked stores for Australian Military Forces operating in Timor (Sparrow Force) you are to sail from Darwin p.m. Sunday 31st May and proceed so as to arrive in the vicinity of Suai, Timor, latitude 9 degrees 22 minutes south longitude 125 degrees 15 minutes east at half an hour before sunset on Tuesday 2nd June 1942. In the event of *Kuru* not having arrived before dusk the letter "B" in morse code will be flashed from shore five times in succession every ten minutes until such time as *Kuru* has anchored or until 1730 G.M.T. (about three hours before sunrise). *Kuru* is to answer with letter "K" flashed 5 times but will require continued flashes from shore to assist her in picking up the anchorage. Three fires close together will be lighted in the vicinity of the landing place as an additional guide. Should *Kuru* fail to locate the position she is to stand out to sea and repeat the effort about half an hour before sunset on the following day. On arrival at Suai disembark stores and on completion of embarking mails and stores if requested, return to Darwin at maximum speed shaping such an initial course as to be well clear of the coast of Timor by daylight in order to avoid enemy reconnaissance.

By the beginning of September, *Kuru* had made six successful trips to Timor from Darwin, delivering men and supplies. In July H.M.A.S. *Vigilant*<sup>8</sup> (Sub-Lieutenant Bennett<sup>9</sup>), a former Department of Trade and Customs vessel, which was requisitioned in October 1940, entered the Darwin-Timor run. She left Darwin on her initial voyage for Suai on 25th July, and returned to Darwin on the 29th, and by the beginning of September had made three successful trips. H.M.A.S. *Kalgoorlie* (Lieut-Commander Litchfield<sup>1</sup>), with 14 soldiers and 15 tons of supplies, left Darwin for Betano on 12th September. Landfall was made in the vicinity of Betano soon after 3 p.m. on the 13th, but a sighting of the masts of three ships caused Litchfield to alter course away to avoid contact, and to remain in the offing awaiting aerial reconnaissance. This later reported all clear, and *Kalgoorlie* reached Betano, where she anchored in 12 fathoms only 150 yards from the beach, in the evening of the 15th, sailing again two-and-a-half hours later after disembarking her troops and stores. She was back in Darwin at 8.35 a.m. on the 17th.

On 26th June 1942, Northern Territory Force was told from Army Headquarters, Melbourne, that the 2/4th Independent Company (which was in the Darwin area) would relieve the detached Sparrow Force and

<sup>8</sup> HMAS *Vigilant*, 106 tons; renamed *Sleuth* 17 Apr 1944, *Hawk* 13 Mar 1945.

<sup>9</sup> Lt-Cdr H. A. Bennett; RANR. Comd HMAS's *Kuru* and *Vigilant* 1942-43; HMAS *Swan* 1944; comd HMAS *Warrnambool* 1945-46. Of Claremont, WA; b. Claremont, 3 May 1919.

<sup>1</sup> Lt-Cdr H. A. Litchfield; RANR. Comd HMAS's *Kalgoorlie* 1941-44, *Bendigo* 1944, *Stuart* 1944-45. Of Sydney; b. 24 Jun 1901.

2/2nd Independent Company in Timor. "Relief to commence immediately." Various factors combined to delay this movement, and on the last day of July, Area Combined Headquarters, Darwin, told Central War Room that it was proposed to effect the relief "about the middle to end of September". It would entail the transportation to Timor of about 400 men and equipment, and the return about a fortnight later of about 600 men with rifles and personal equipment. Remarking that the Japanese knew of the occasional visits of *Kuru* and *Vigilant*, Darwin said it was desirable to get the greatest degree of tactical surprise by landing the whole of the first party, and later embarking the whole of the second party, at once, or at least in not more than two trips, using fast vessels. There was none such available in Darwin. Comsouwespac, on 14th August, directed that *Voyager*, then in Fremantle, be ordered immediately to Darwin.

H.M.A.S. *Voyager*, after her return to Australia from the Mediterranean in September 1941, went into dockyard hands for a much needed long refit. Command was assumed on 6th January 1942 by Lieut-Commander R. C. Robison, formerly First Lieutenant (with periods in command) of *Stuart*. *Voyager* became effective after refit on 30th March 1942, and after nearly a month of escort work based on Sydney, she arrived in Fremantle on 13th May, and thenceforward was based on that port, performing escort and patrol duties. She sailed from Fremantle on 14th September for Darwin—where she arrived on the 20th—to carry the 2/4th Independent Company to Timor.

At 6 p.m. on Tuesday, 22nd September, *Voyager*, having embarked about 15 tons of army stores, eight army barges, a 14-foot motor skiff, and 250 officers and men of the 2/4th Independent Company under Captain Garvey,<sup>2</sup> sailed from Darwin. Sub-Lieutenant Bennett, who had previously made an aerial reconnaissance of Betano and had been there in command of *Kuru* and *Vigilant*, was in *Voyager* to help with navigational knowledge and advice. Next day, at 5.45 p.m., Timor was sighted through heavy haze, and a landfall was made to the east of Betano Bay. *Voyager*, steering westerly to keep two miles off shore, altered northward into Betano Bay at 6.23 p.m.

Situated roughly midway along Timor's southern coast, a wide, open bay some two-and-a-half miles across (E.N.E.-W.S.W.) between its embracing points, of shallow indentation but steep to with deep water close in to the beach, Betano Bay offers little in the way of anchorage or harbourage. The eastern half, which affords some protection from the South-East Trades, is cluttered with reefs. The western half, with good sandy beaches, is open to the South-East Trades, and surf ridden. The only sheltered anchorage for small craft is in a channel between two reefs in about the centre of the bay. There were no navigational aids or marks on shore to help in anchoring, and Robison had nothing by which to navigate save

<sup>2</sup> Maj K. B. Garvey. OC 2/8 Indep Coy, 2/4 Indep Coy, 2/4 Cdo Sqn. Company secretary; of Bondi, NSW; b. Woollahra, NSW, 23 Feb 1910.



a very rough sketch plan (with no soundings), his echo sounder, and lead, and such information as Sub-Lieutenant Bennett was able to give him.

At 6.23 p.m. on 23rd September, *Voyager* was steaming, engines at "Slow", northward into Betano Bay. The echo sounder then registered 128 fathoms, followed closely by 25 fathoms when the ship was about three-quarters of a mile from the shore. *Voyager* felt her way in towards the anchorage between the reefs, with echo sounder, and leadsmen in the chains. At 6.28, about two-and-a-half cables (500 yards) from the beach and three-and-a-half to four cables from the main (seaward) reef, Robison stopped the ship and let go starboard anchor. A minute later, when the ship was riding to her cable, apparently with ample swinging room, he gave the order to hoist out all boats and carry on disembarking troops. Meanwhile the ship's whaler was lowered, and soundings were taken round the ship.

About five minutes after anchoring, Robison realised that the ship—which had swung to her anchor port side parallel to the shore, with the main reef on the starboard bow—appeared to be closing the beach bodily. He decided it advisable to weigh and shift out to deep water. The best way to get out was to swing the stern out by going astern on the port engine. Unfortunately by now disembarkation boats had been lowered, and two army barges, half full of troops, were immediately over the port propeller. Robison could not get the troops to understand the necessity to move the barges quickly. "There was a considerable amount of loud talking, catcalling etc. taking place, and I found it extremely difficult to get my orders through and obeyed." He was in taxing dilemma. "By going astern on the port engine and ahead on the starboard to endeavour to get the stern out into deep water, I should have upset the boats and army personnel." He decided, therefore,

to turn the ship to starboard and proceed ahead. The starboard propeller was clear, and I decided to head the ship clear of the reef by moving that engine slow astern.<sup>3</sup>

For some 16 minutes Robison manoeuvred *Voyager* slowly round, using his starboard propeller only. Then at 6.50 p.m. "Half ahead both. Starboard twenty degrees. Ship's head clear of reefs." Less than a minute later, and only 23 minutes after she had anchored and started disembarkation, *Voyager* took the ground aft. Efforts to free and float her, continued by all possible means until noon next day, were fruitless, and were hampered by a south-east wind rising to moderate force, and raising a moderate sea which bumped the ship on the ground. A kedge anchor was laid out, its pull was reinforced by that on one of the ship's bower anchors laid out alongside it on a 3½-inch wire led through the stern and "brought to the capstan fully backed up by hands". Depth-charges and heavy weights aft were jettisoned, torpedoes fired. Nothing availed. At noon on the 24th

<sup>3</sup> Robison, "Letter of Proceedings of HMAS *Voyager* from Monday, 21 Sep 1942 to 25 Sep 1942". Dated 26 Sep 1942.

"attempts to salvage ship without further aid were abandoned, as propellers were firmly embedded in the sand, it being over the shafts. At low water she was high and dry with a bank of sand piled high on the seaward side."

A start was made on clearing the beach of boats and gear from *Voyager*, shifting it up among the vines and trees for concealment, when an enemy reconnaissance aircraft—with one Zero fighter escort—appeared at 1.30 p.m. It was shot down by *Voyager's* gunfire. But with the expectation that the enemy's discovery of *Voyager* would result in an air attack, and with advice from the army that land attack could be expected also, Robison started systematic wrecking and destruction of the ship. This was helped forward by the Japanese just after 4 p.m., when three heavy bombers, accompanied by two fighters, and later relieved by two other bombers, "proceeded to bomb the ship relentlessly with high explosive, incendiary, and anti-personnel bombs from about 3,000 feet". Later, at 8 p.m., *Voyager's* company continued the work of destruction with the firing of demolition charges in the engine room, "both sides of which blew out and broke the ship's back".

In the evening of the 23rd, Robison told N.O.I.C. Darwin by signal of his plight, and about 1 a.m. on the 24th amplified that signal with news of the failure to refloat the ship, and "intend to wreck ship by demolition if capture seems probable".

In Darwin on the 23rd the corvette *Warrnambool* (Lieutenant Barron<sup>4</sup>) returned to base in the afternoon after patrolling the western approaches. She anchored, and obtained permission to cool off furnaces and rebuild cones which had collapsed. It was her first birthday. Barron recorded in his "Letter of Proceedings" that during her twelve months in commission she had

steamed 36,000 miles, carried out five evacuations or rescue trips, been present in eighteen air raids, ferried four thousand troops in New Guinea, and landed part of the Plover Force in Dobo.<sup>5</sup> Although narrowly missed on two occasions, the ship has not been hit, and up to date she can be reckoned a lucky ship and certainly a happy one.

*Warrnambool* was not now, however, allowed the rest she had been granted. At 2 a.m. on 24th September Barron received orders to proceed alongside to fuel and water. To enable the ship to raise steam

Stoker H. C. Mildenhall<sup>6</sup> went into a furnace which had barely started to cool down and effected temporary repairs. . . . This task was carried out under conditions which few men could endure, even though wrapped in wet bags as Mildenhall was, and is worthy of special mention.

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<sup>4</sup> Lt-Cdr E. J. Barron, VRD; RANVR. Comd HMAS's *Warrnambool* 1941-43, *Kybra* 1943, *Launceston* 1944-46. Master stevedore; of Fremantle, WA; b. Tavistock, England, 5 Jun 1900.

<sup>5</sup> In company with HMAS *Southern Cross*, *Warrnambool* between 9th and 14th July 1942, took N.E.I. troops and stores from Darwin to Dobo, in the Aru Islands, where they disembarked them without opposition (supported by RAAF aircraft) on the 12th and 13th of the month.

<sup>6</sup> Stoker PO H. C. Mildenhall, S5204. HMAS's *Warrnambool*, Cowra, Goulburn. B. Byron Bay, NSW, 23 Jul 1922.

At 8.30 a.m. on the 24th, *Warrnambool* proceeded to sea "bound for Timor to render assistance to *Voyager*".

Twenty-four hours later at Betano, at 4.30 a.m. on the 25th, Robison, with the help of Able Seaman C. J. Webb,<sup>7</sup> set fire to *Voyager* fore and aft. The aft half, Robison recorded,

burned fiercely all day and ready use ammunition and magazines blew up intermittently all day. The forward magazine had not blown up at nightfall although the ship was on fire forward.

In *Warrnambool*, Barron's account of the events of the 25th opened a few minutes after *Voyager* was fired in the darkness of the early morning.

At sea. 0425 Heard several aircraft overhead bound towards Dili. 0937 Sighted friendly aircraft. 1830 Sighted mast of H.M.A.S. *Kalgoorlie* astern. 2200 Made contact by flashing light with *Voyager*'s people ashore. 2203 Motor boat away to shore. 2217 Motor boat alongside with three barges full of men in tow. 2222 Anchored in 17 fathoms near wreck of *Voyager*, and close to *Kalgoorlie*, while more men were brought off. Took aboard two landing craft, weighed and proceeded at 2308, *Kalgoorlie* following shortly afterwards.

On Sunday, 27th September, *Warrnambool* (after prayers on the quarter-deck at 9.30 a.m.) and *Kalgoorlie* reached Darwin at 11.30 a.m., carrying respectively three officers and 79 ratings, and four officers and 66 ratings, all of *Voyager*'s company (seven of them, including Robison, minor casualties from the Japanese air attacks) excepting one able seaman who remained on Timor with the Independent Company. *Voyager*'s epitaph was written six weeks later in a letter from the Secretary, Naval Board, to the authorities concerned: "I am directed by the Naval Board to inform you that H.M.A.S. *Voyager* is to be regarded as formally paying off on 25th September 1942."

## VI

Soon after this phase of the Timor operations, the final curtain fell on the Japanese attempt to take Milne Bay. Despite Japanese attempts to rescue them, there still remained on Goodenough Island those Japanese troops intended for the flank attack on Milne Bay, who were marooned there when their landing barges were destroyed by Allied air attack on 25th August. An operation instruction of 1st October from General Headquarters, South-West Pacific Area, to General Blamey nominated the clearing of the enemy from Goodenough Island and its establishment as an advanced base and airfield, as the first objective in a plan for an Allied attack on Buna from the south-east in conjunction with that from the south over the Owen Stanley Range. Blamey said it was intended to use one battalion in one move if possible, and asked G.H.Q. if two destroyers could be made available. MacArthur replied that they could—and they were, in H.M.A. Ships *Arunta* and *Stuart*.

These two ships, which had been escorting New Guinea convoys, met

<sup>7</sup> It was Able Seaman Webb who, then Ordinary Seaman Webb, when *Voyager* was at Navplion during the withdrawal from Greece in April 1941, jumped overboard to rescue a nursing sister who fell between *Voyager* and a caique (see Vol I, p. 322).

for the operation in Milne Bay on 21st October, and final details were arranged at a conference of representatives of the Navy, Army and Air Force in *Stuart* that afternoon. Next morning they embarked 640 officers and men (*Arunta* 520, *Stuart* 120) of the 2/12th Battalion A.I.F., and at 2 p.m. sailed in company from Milne Bay. The voyage to Goodenough Island was made without incident. At 6.30 p.m. the destroyers parted company, and *Arunta* made for Mud Bay on Goodenough's east coast, while *Stuart*—in “a most startling electrical storm; although the clouds were heavy, obscuring the light of the full moon, the lightning often surrounded the ship in a shower of sparks similar to rocket bursts”—continued on through Ward Hunt Strait to Taleba Bay, on the south-west coast of Goodenough, where she arrived at 1 a.m. on the 23rd.

Just before she anchored, *Stuart* received a “Most Immediate” signal telling her and *Arunta* that a Japanese cruiser was making for Goodenough Island “to contact enemy forces by 0400”. This news, coupled with a breakdown in communications between *Arunta* and *Stuart*, could have led to a serious incident a few hours later. The original plan was for *Arunta* and *Stuart*, after they had landed their troops, to rendezvous at daylight on the 23rd in the same position as that in which they had parted company the previous evening. But on receipt of the enemy report, *Arunta* signalled her intention to change the rendezvous. By 2 a.m. on the 23rd *Stuart* had completed disembarkation, and at 2.10 she weighed and set course, in very heavy rain and low visibility, over the ground covered on the inward passage. No signal had been received from *Arunta* (a code word indicating completion of disembarkation had been arranged) and it was assumed that she was still disembarking at Mud Bay. At 4 a.m. on the 23rd *Stuart* rounded Cape Vogel and, Spurgeon reported in his Letter of Proceedings,

set course to the southward with the object of encountering if possible the enemy cruiser with all the advantages of dawn light and land background on our side. Suddenly a ship was sighted on the starboard bow. Within a few seconds torpedoes and guns were ready in spite of the fact that all hands had been soaked through for hours. Full speed was rung down, and revolutions for 29 knots had been reached within two minutes. The order to fire was about to be given as the torpedo sights came on when as a sudden afterthought it was realised that it might be *Arunta*. The challenge was made and the correct reply received. It was subsequently learned that *Arunta* had made a signal to *Stuart* which had not been received by the Army operators manning the set loaned to *Stuart*.

As it was, the ships reached Milne Bay in company at 6.30 a.m. on the 23rd.

On Goodenough Island the 2/12th Battalion was unable to bring the main Japanese force to battle, and when they mounted an attack on the 25th they found that the enemy had left the island. It was found out later that the Japanese troops on Goodenough (a total of approximately 350 according to one Japanese source, of 1,318 according to “Eastern New Guinea Invasion Operations”, Japanese Monograph No. 96) were lifted from that island to adjacent Fergusson Island by barge or submarine,

and were taken thence to Rabaul, where they arrived on 26th October, by *Tenryu*. The attempted capture of Milne Bay, which thus closed, cost the Japanese the destroyer *Yayoi* sunk; and in casualties 334 killed, 417 missing, and 335 wounded; and heavy losses of ammunition, equipment, and material.

## CHAPTER 7

### ON AUSTRALIA'S OCEAN COMMUNICATIONS

WHILE the events discussed above were taking place in Australian or near Australian waters, others—which concerned Australia both in the part played in them by her ships and men, and the influence they had on her existing and future welfare—were happening or shaping on the widespread western flank. In North Africa at the end of July the British stood firm at El Alamein facing an enemy operating over long lines of communication and getting less and less in supplies. The Axis, in July, finally decided to abandon the invasion of Malta. Conditions on the island had improved for the defenders. Between June and August, two convoys (“Harpoon” and “Pedestal”) were fought through from the west and 195 fighter aircraft reinforcements were flown in. In July the 10th Submarine Flotilla, which had been withdrawn from Malta to Alexandria in April, returned to the island. The effect of Malta’s revival was quickly marked on Axis convoys to North Africa, which from then on suffered increasing losses.<sup>1</sup> The determined stand of the Eighth Army at El Alamein enabled the return to Alexandria, after about five weeks at Ismailia, of the operational staff of the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, and of the ships from the rearward bases. While Rommel’s supplies proved inadequate to his needs (his lack stultified his August attack on the Eighth Army at Alam el Halfa, the objective of which was the Suez Canal)<sup>2</sup> the British were able to build up their strength via their ocean communications round the Cape.

Ocean communications remained the key to victory, and those on Australia’s western flank were of paramount importance. They were vital in preventing that German breakout through the Middle East, and junction with their Far Eastern allies, which was the vision of the “Great Plan”. They were vital to the defence of India; to the succouring of Russia; to the rescue of Burma and Malaya; and to the safety of Australia. Outweighing all else they were vital to the defence of Iraq and Persia, and the Persian oil on which all else depended. “If we lost the Persian oil, we inevitably lost Egypt, command of the Indian Ocean, and endangered the whole Indian-Burma situation.”<sup>3</sup> In July 1942 Indian Ocean com-

<sup>1</sup> Figures of Axis losses in North African convoys, July to October 1942, as given in a post-war essay by the German C-in-C, Mediterranean, Vice-Admiral Weichold, were:

Month	Total G.R.T.	Sunk	Damaged	Percentage
July . . . . .	107,000	10,000		
August . . . . .	114,000	38,000	2,000	35%
September . . . . .	108,000	23,000	9,000	30%
October . . . . .	96,000	24,000	14,000	40%

<sup>2</sup> On 29th August, because of the non-arrival of promised petrol and ammunition, Rommel limited his object to that of defeating the Eighth Army at El Alamein. “The further objectives in my directive are not obtainable.” Four days later he wrote in his war diary: “The non-arrival of petrol requested, which was the condition laid down for the successful carrying out of even limited operations, forbids the continuation of the attack.”

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide* (1957), p. 440. Lord Alanbrooke, autobiographical note.

munications were in better shape than they had been three months earlier when the Japanese carriers and battle fleet ravaged the Bay of Bengal and attacked Ceylon. That island was now strongly garrisoned, so that it was possible to return to Australia the two brigade groups of the A.I.F. which, at Australia's suggestion, had been landed in Ceylon in March to augment the garrison there during the crisis till British forces could arrive. They sailed from Colombo, a total of 12,120, on 13th July 1942, in "Schooner" convoy of eleven ships escorted by H.M. Ships *Gambia*<sup>4</sup> and *Worcestershire* (armed merchant cruiser, 11,402 tons).<sup>5</sup>

Though the Indian Ocean position had improved with the diminishing likelihood of a major Japanese descent into that area, it was desirable to build up the Eastern Fleet, not only against such eventuality, but also in preparation for a swing over to the offensive against the Japanese. But the pressure of events and of plans elsewhere led rather to the weakening than the strengthening of Admiral Somerville's force. Ishizaki's submarines continued in the early part of July the attacks on ships in the Mozambique Channel which had resulted in fourteen sinkings in June. They now raised that total by another five victims aggregating 21,477 tons. The Eastern Fleet had only two destroyers available for escort work there. Of 26 destroyers allocated to the fleet, 4 were detached to the Mediterranean, 5 had not yet joined, 5 were under repair, 5 were with the slow battleships, and 5 with the battlefleet. Of 16 sloops, corvettes etc. (3 of them Australian—*Bathurst*, *Lismore* and *Geraldton*) 12 were employed escorting trade in the India-Ceylon area, and the others supplementing Colombo's inadequate anti-submarine protection. At this period *Indomitable* and destroyers were detached from the Fleet to help to fight the August convoy, "Pedestal", through the Mediterranean to Malta; and on 24th August *Formidable* was taken from Somerville to replace *Indomitable*—damaged in the "Pedestal" operation—in the forthcoming North African operations. By the end of August, Somerville's Force "A"—the fast squadron which was the main shield against a Japanese descent in force into the Indian Ocean—comprised only *Illustrious*, *Warspite*, *Valiant*, and one or two cruisers.

Presumably unaware of this (since the Australian Combined Operations Intelligence Centre's "Daily Naval Summary" consistently showed the Eastern Fleet at its full "on paper" strength, and on 30th August detailed its composition, by names, as 5 battleships, 3 aircraft carriers, 3 heavy cruisers, 16 light cruisers, 9 armed merchant cruisers and "approximately" 25 destroyers), the Australian Government in August importuned both the

<sup>4</sup> HMS *Gambia*, cruiser (1942), 8,000 tons, twelve 6-in guns, eight 4-in AA guns, 33 kts. Commissioned HMNZS *Gambia* on 22nd September 1943.

<sup>5</sup> "Schooner" Convoy consisted of *Rajula*, *Aronda* (4,062 tons), *Ekma* (5,108 tons), *Westernland*, *Devonshire*, *Clan Macdonald* (9,653 tons), *Athlone Castle*, *City of Canterbury*, *Dunedin Star* (11,168 tons), *Martand* (8,000 tons), *City of Lille* (6,588 tons). This last named was unable to maintain the convoy speed of 11½ knots and was detached on 16th July to proceed independently. Personnel carried in the convoy were: AIF, 13,063; RAAF, 178; RAN, 57; Nursing Sisters, 76. On 19th July *Gambia* was relieved by USS *Phoenix* and next day *Kanimbla* relieved *Worcestershire* as ocean escorts. On 28th July the first-named six ships of the convoy arrived at Fremantle. They sailed thence on 31st July for Sydney where they arrived on 6th August escorted by *Phoenix* and HMA Ships *Manoora* and *Westralia*. The balance of the convoy, escorted by *Kanimbla*, proceeded to Melbourne where they arrived on 7th August.

British Prime Minister and the American President to concentrate naval strength in the Pacific with the help of the Eastern Fleet.

In a telegram of 25th August to Mr Churchill, Mr Curtin referred to the views of the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff, expressed in the previous April, that "when the moment is opportune, the naval forces of the United Nations should take the strategic offensive in the Pacific". Curtin suggested that the moment was now opportune, and that it was evident from the Coral Sea, Midway, and Solomon Islands naval engagements, that operations in the Pacific were "leading to a naval clash which may well decide the course of the conflict in this theatre". He concluded:

It is therefore desired to know what are the present prospects and plans for the concentration of a superior naval force in the Pacific which presumably could only be done by the transfer of part of the Eastern Fleet to that region.

In his reply to this telegram (copies of which had been sent to Roosevelt and to S. M. Bruce, with directions to the last named to follow up the question of Eastern Fleet cooperation "in your most persistent and energetic manner") Churchill said that in the British view the possible transfer of British naval forces to the Pacific from the Indian Ocean was not yet opportune. In detailed explanation Churchill said that, though India's land strength had increased, a division and armoured brigade had recently been moved thence to reinforce Persia-Iraq, and demands elsewhere had checked the planned establishment of "what we consider should be the minimum shore-based air force strength in the Indian Ocean theatre". As to the Eastern Fleet:

Our plans for naval reinforcement of the Eastern Fleet have had to be withheld, firstly on account of the need for replenishing Malta and again for operations contemplated in the near future. The present strength of the Eastern Fleet is two modernised battleships, one aircraft carrier, and a bare minimum of cruisers and destroyers. In addition there are two "R" class, unmodern and short of destroyer screen.

The situation in the light of Churchill's reply—and of advice from Bruce that "there was no prospect of altering the views set out" therein—was discussed by the Advisory War Council on 9th September, though without knowledge of the nature of the "operations contemplated in the near future" to which Churchill referred. In telegrams on 11th September to Churchill and Roosevelt, Curtin expressed surprise that naval strength to build up the Eastern Fleet to a point when it could help in the Pacific was "being disposed in theatres other than the Indian and Pacific Oceans". He went on to say that in the lack of superior naval concentration there was no alternative but to press for the land and air strength necessary for the local defence of Australia. To the request for such additional strength Roosevelt replied on 16th September that it was "clear that the United States Pacific Fleet is unable to provide a superior naval force solely concerned with the defence of Australia and New Zealand", and went on to examine the "necessity for and possibility of increasing the



ground and air forces required for the territorial defence of Australia". In an analysis of Japan's shipping resources, the President stated:

It is estimated that the Japanese have at this time a maximum of 700,000 tons of shipping available for employment in large-scale military operations, and that this shipping could support about 200,000 troops. After considering all of the factors involved, I agree with the conclusions of the Combined Chiefs of Staff that your present armed forces, assuming that they are fully equipped and effectively trained, are sufficient to defeat the present Japanese force in New Guinea and to provide for the security of Australia against an invasion on the scale that the Japanese are capable of launching at this time or in the immediate future.

Roosevelt went on to say that present commitments of Allied shipping did not permit of moving additional troops to Australia "now or in the immediate future", and concluded: "However, I am confident that you appreciate fully the necessity of rigidly pursuing our over-all strategy that envisages the early and decisive defeat of Germany in order that we can quickly undertake an 'all-out' effort in the Pacific."

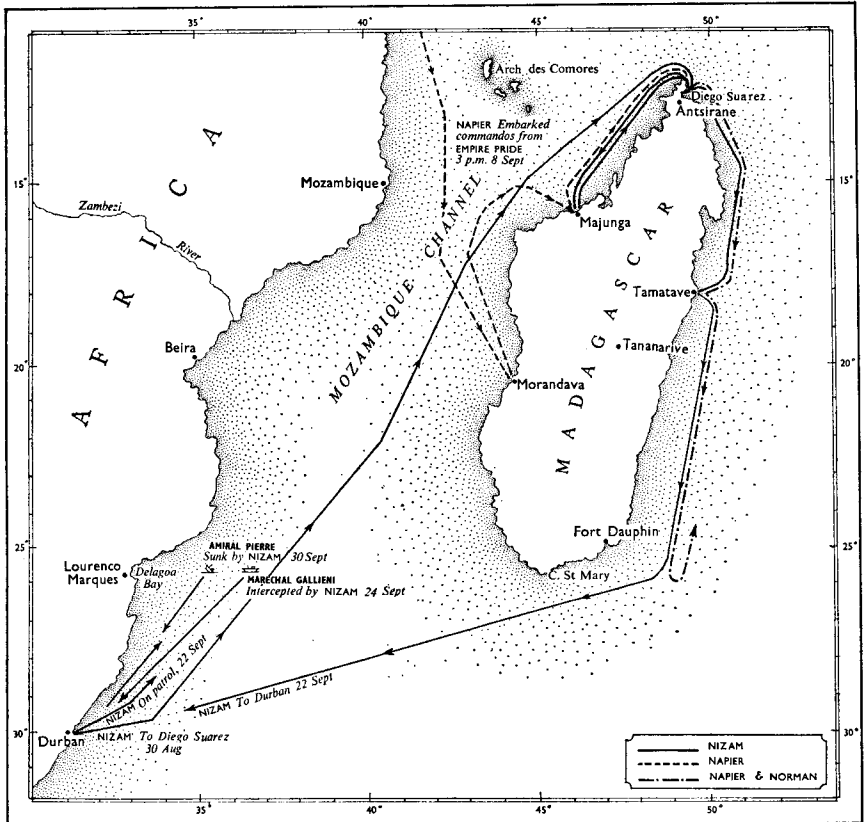
A result of this was the Australian Government's decision in October again to request the return of the 9th Division from the Middle East, which brought from Roosevelt on 1st November an offer "to ameliorate not only Australia's present position, but the position in that area of the United Nations as well", by sending to Australia an American division from Hawaii, a readjustment in the Pacific "which I feel is justified in the existing situation". Roosevelt assumed that sending this division "will obviate the necessity for the Australian War Council to call back the 9th Division from the Middle East. I cannot too strongly stress that leaving the 9th A.I.F. Division in the Middle East will best serve our common cause." The 9th Division, having played a vital part in the victory at El Alamein, was, however, withdrawn from the Eighth Army, and sailed for Australia in February 1943.

## II

One of the "operations contemplated in the near future" referred to in Churchill's reply to Curtin's telegram of 25th August—the occupation of Madagascar—was launched before this exchange of telegrams was concluded. With the occupation of Diego Suarez in April 1942, it was hoped that the Governor-General of Madagascar (M. Annet) would amend his pro-Vichy attitude. The attacks by submarines on ships in the Mozambique Channel, and the menace to the important "WS" convoys, made it necessary to secure the use of ports on the west coast of Madagascar and, the Governor-General failing to cooperate, the British Government decided in August to subjugate the entire island. The operation was in three parts—"Stream", a surprise landing at Majunga on the west coast by the 29th Brigade; "Line", an advance overland by a detachment of an East African brigade and South African armoured cars from Majunga to Tananarive, the capital; "Jane", a landing by the 29th Brigade (re-embarked from Majunga) at Tamatave on the east coast. Rear-Admiral Tennant, commanding 4th Cruiser Squadron in *Birmingham*, was in charge of the naval

operations under the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Somerville, and the four Australian destroyers of the 7th Flotilla, *Napier*, *Nizam*, *Norman* and *Nepal*, under Commodore Arliss (Commodore Commanding Eastern Fleet Destroyer Flotillas in *Napier*) took part.

On 5th September *Nizam* was in Diego Suarez where, her war diary recorded, she "paid ship's company in francs, and each rating received



Madagascar, August-September 1942

a bottle of beer". On the 7th she sailed for Majunga as one of the escorts of a convoy of assault ships. On the 9th they joined up with more assault ships together with *Birmingham*, *Illustrious*, and, among other ships, the former Australian seaplane carrier *Albatross*. The assault on Majunga next day was quickly successful, and the defenders surrendered at 8.30 a.m. *Nizam*, having escorted assault ships to the attack, spent the rest of the day rounding up and capturing small craft and sending them in to Majunga. Meanwhile, also on the 10th, *Napier* carried out a diversionary operation some 500 miles down the coast at Morandava. She had sailed with the

*Birmingham* group from Kilindini on 6th September, but had detached in the afternoon of the 7th, embarked a commando troop at sea from the transport *Empire Pride* (9,248 tons), and put them on shore at Morandava soon after dawn on the 10th. On shore, the commandos seized the wireless station, post office, aerodrome, and other key points, and penetrated some distance inland spreading disturbing alarmist rumours before re-embarking in *Napier*, which sailed with six prisoners—including the Chief Administrator of the region, and the Mayor of Morandava—at 8.15 a.m. on the 12th for Majunga, where she arrived on the morning of the 13th, and later that day sailed for Diego Suarez, where the Tamatave (“Jane”) force assembled. *Nizam*, escorting some “Jane” force assault ships, sailed from Diego Suarez on the 15th and arrived off Tamatave before dawn on the 18th. Ships taking part in the operation included *Illustrious*, *Warspite*, the Dutch *Jacob van Heemskerck*,<sup>6</sup> *Van Galen* and *Tjerk Hiddes*,<sup>7</sup> and the four Australian destroyers. The convoy entered Tamatave harbour at 5.40 a.m. *Nizam* recorded: “Town completely surprised. After being asked to surrender, the ships opened fire. The town surrendered at 7.32 a.m.” *Nizam* then proceeded to screen *Warspite*, who was waiting well off shore to bombard heavy fortifications; and in the afternoon the destroyer “proceeded to Durban with *Illustrious*, *Hotspur*, *Napier* and *Norman*”. These two last named parted company on the 19th to return to Madagascar.

Tananarive, which was declared an open city by the Vichy French, was occupied on 23rd September, but M. Annet withdrew to the south of the island, and it was not until 5th November that he capitulated at Ihosy, which town was entered by South African troops of the Pretoria Regiment who, on 29th September, had been landed at Tulear, on the south-west coast. The instrument of capitulation was signed soon after midnight on 5th November. The South Africans entered Ihosy on 8th November, and “it is related that M. Annet himself took the salute as the tired and dirty warriors of the Union drove past singing ‘Annie doesn’t live here any more’.”<sup>8</sup>

While the other Australian destroyers of the 7th Flotilla operated with the Madagascar forces, *Nizam*, who arrived at Durban on 22nd September with *Illustrious* operated out of that port on patrols to intercept Vichy French merchant ships. On 24th September she intercepted *Marechal Gallieni* (1,559 tons) about 130 miles east of Lourenco Marques, and took her into Durban in prize. On 29th September she intercepted in the same area the Vichy French *Amiral Pierre* (4,391 tons), formerly the Greek *Yiannis* which had been seized by the French in Madagascar. *Amiral Pierre*’s crew took scuttling action when sighted, and a boarding party from *Nizam* found that the extent of damage precluded her being towed,

<sup>6</sup> *Jacob van Heemskerck*, Dutch cruiser (1940), 3,350 tons, ten 4-in AA guns, 33 kts.

<sup>7</sup> *Van Galen*, *Tjerk Hiddes*, Dutch destroyers (1944), 1,690 tons, six 4.7-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 36 kts.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Buckley, *Five Ventures* (1954), p. 207. “Annie Doesn’t Live Here Any More” was a popular comic song of the period.

so she was sunk by gunfire on 30th September. In both these instances the original sightings were made, and the positions of the Vichy ships were given by aircraft of the South African Air Force. On 7th October, *Nizam* arrived at Simonstown for docking and a much needed refit.

### III

Though the various demands on the Eastern Fleet did not permit of such units as to constitute a "concentration of superior force" to be detached for service in the Pacific, calls for help did not go entirely unheard. In response to a request late in September, the Admiralty, with the concurrence of the Netherlands naval authorities, detached *Jacob van Heemskerck* and the destroyers *Van Galen* and *Tjerk Hiddes* from the Eastern Fleet in October, as soon as they could be spared from the Madagascar operations, for service in the South-West Pacific Area. They reached Fremantle on 25th October, and came under MacArthur's operational command. Before the end of 1942 Churchill was able to tell Curtin that steps were being taken for a larger scale reinforcement of Pacific naval forces by the British. In response to an urgent request by the United States—Churchill telegraphed on 2nd December—it was proposed to offer the aircraft carriers *Victorious*<sup>9</sup> and *Illustrious*, under the command of a British admiral, for service under American orders. He added that he hoped this would provide additional and important reinsurance for Australia's safety.

The preliminaries to the American request indicated a lack of liaison between the high commands of the respective navies, and lack of knowledge of what was happening in the respective theatres of operation. In the months between August and the end of the year the struggle for control of the seas in the Solomons area was bitter and unremitting between the Americans and Japanese, with heavy losses on both sides. On 20th October, Admiral Nimitz wrote to Admiral King: "Now is a golden opportunity for the British Eastern Fleet to take action on the Japanese west flank." Commenting on this, the American Naval Historian remarked:<sup>1</sup> "But the British Far Eastern Fleet" (which then consisted of *Illustrious*, *Warspite*, and *Valiant*) "remained in the Indian Ocean." Nimitz's suggestion was passed on to the Admiralty by Admiral H. R. Stark, head of the American Mission in London. The Admiralty signalled to Admiral Little, head of the British Mission in Washington, pointing out that preparations for the North African landings, which had been given overriding strategical priority by both Governments, had reduced the Eastern Fleet to one carrier and two battleships, and they "could not discover what they could do" to reduce the pressure in the Pacific. Admiral King was away from Washington when the Admiralty's message arrived, and no one there knew who had originated the suggestion of British help. Admiral Little did, however, discover American needs, and on 27th October signalled to the Admiralty

<sup>9</sup> HMS *Victorious*, aircraft carrier (1941), 23,000 tons, sixteen 4.5-in dual purpose guns, 70 aircraft, 30 kts.

<sup>1</sup> Morison, Vol V, p. 184.

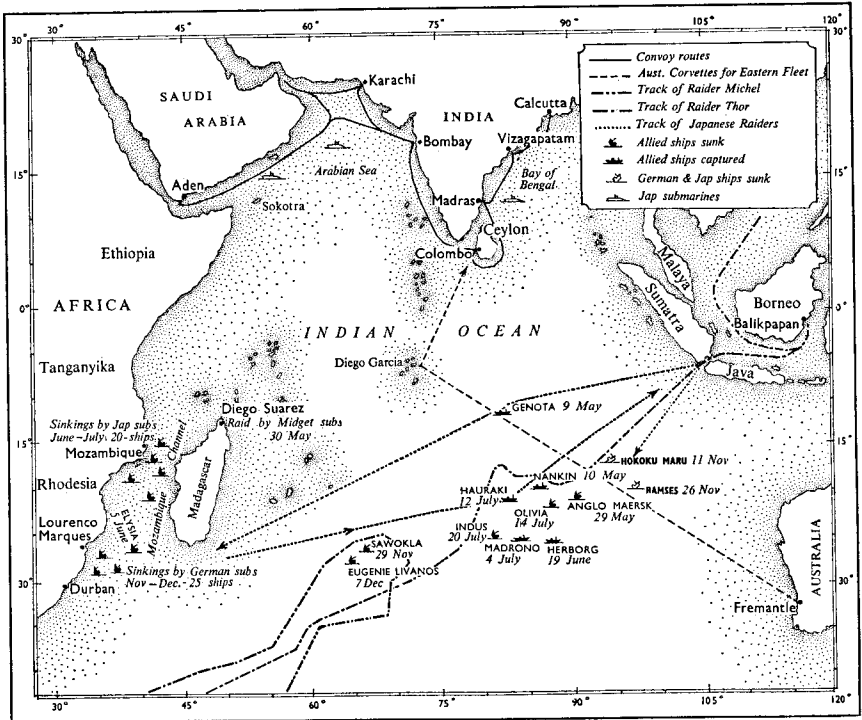
urging "that one or more of the Eastern Fleet's carriers be sent to the Pacific". The Battle of Santa Cruz had been fought in the Solomons on 26th-27th October, and the Americans lost the carrier *Hornet* sunk, and were reduced to only one carrier in the South Pacific—*Enterprise*—and she badly damaged. "This," signalled Admiral Little, "is a real cry for immediate help." As it was, neither British nor Americans knew of each other's shortages and difficulties in their respective areas, and there was considerable misunderstanding and some ruffled tempers before matters were sorted out. But on 8th December Little was instructed to tell King that *Victorious*, then with the Home Fleet, would be ready to leave the Clyde for the United States and the Pacific, with three destroyers, on 19th December. Actually she sailed from Greenock at 2.10 p.m. on Sunday, 20th December, and one of her escorting destroyers was Australian—H.M.A.S. *Quickmatch*<sup>2</sup> (Lieut-Commander R. Rhoades)—the latest addition to the Royal Australian Navy's destroyer strength, which had commissioned in England on 30th September. *Victorious* and her escorts crossed the Atlantic in heavy weather in which they met a series of eleven "depressions with gale force winds in each and heavy swells", and reached Bermuda on 30th December, and Norfolk, Virginia, U.S.A., on 1st January 1943. The Eastern Fleet lost *Illustrious* in January—but not, as Churchill had said in December, by her going to the Pacific. She was sent to the United Kingdom to be brought up to date "before taking part in projected operations in northern waters". She sailed from Kilindini on 13th January, her escorts—as had those of *Victorious*—including Australian destroyers, in this instance H.M.A. Ships *Norman* and *Nepal*. The withdrawal of other ships from Somerville's command at this juncture<sup>3</sup> reduced the Eastern Fleet to a trade protection force, with even the vessels for this duty diminished in numbers owing to urgent requirements elsewhere. In circumstances in which the Allies had to scour the seven seas for ships—both naval and merchant—to meet the constantly arising and expanding demands associated with large-scale operations forthcoming, the Eastern Fleet, in the ocean least likely to be the scene of a major foray by an enemy fleet, became a "strategic reserve" to be drawn upon almost to extinction, a victim of global strategy.

Meanwhile, in the second half of 1942, enemy action made increasing calls upon the Fleet's trade protection capabilities. Surface raiders sank or captured five ships in the Indian Ocean during the period. At 11 p.m. on 12th July, Perth radio intercepted a raider distress message from the British ship *Hauraki* (7,113 tons), bound from Fremantle to Colombo. About 1,500 miles south of her destination she was intercepted by the Japanese raiders *Hokoku Maru* and *Aikoku Maru*, then on their way to their base in Penang from their operations with Ishizaki's submarines.

<sup>2</sup> HMAS *Quickmatch*, destroyer (1942), 1,650 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 32 kts.

<sup>3</sup> The Eastern Fleet's War Diary for January 1943, recorded: "HM Ships *Vallant*, *Illustrious*, *Ranchi*, *Hotspur*, *Express*, *Fortune*, *Inconstant*, have left the station for the U.K." (*Ranchi* was an A.M.C. The four last named were destroyers.)

At 11.20 *Hauraki* repeated the raider distress cry, and added "captured by Japanese". Her final signal, at 11.36 p.m. on the 12th was "Boat alongside now". On 20th July Esperance (Western Australia) radio station heard a raider cry from the British *Indus* (5,187 tons) which left Colombo on the 4th for Fremantle. At 3 p.m. on the 20th, about 1,800 miles west by north of that port, she met the German raider *Thor*, and there was a brief, fierce gun action between the two ships in which both suffered



Raiders and submarines in the Indian Ocean, 1942

casualties, *Indus* losing 63 of her company, before she was sunk. Sixteen days earlier, and 800 miles N.W. by W. of where she encountered *Indus*, *Thor* had claimed another victim when she captured the Norwegian tanker *Madrono* (5,984 tons) bound from Melbourne to Abadan and sent her to Yokohama with a prize crew. But since *Madrono* failed to transmit a distress message, her fate was not known until after the war. *Indus* completed *Thor*'s score. The raider proceeded to Japan via Sunda Strait and Balikpapan, and reached Yokohama on 9th October. During her five months (May to September) in the Indian Ocean she deprived the Allies of five ships totalling 32,500 tons, and their cargoes. Three of these (two of them tankers), totalling 21,000 tons, she captured, thus enhancing the

value of her exploits by not only depriving the Allies of valuable merchant shipping, but presenting it to the enemy.<sup>4</sup>

Coincidental with *Thor*'s departure from the Indian Ocean to the north-eastward, another German raider, *Michel*, entered from the south-west. She sailed from Germany in March 1942, and for some six months operated in the Atlantic, where she sank eleven ships totalling 77,000 tons. In the Indian Ocean<sup>5</sup> she sank the U.S. *Sawokla* (5,882 tons) on 29th November, and on 7th December sank the Greek *Eugenie Livanos* (4,816 tons). These encounters were in the south-western Indian Ocean some 400 miles south-east of Madagascar. Before the end of the year *Michel* returned to the Atlantic bound for Europe, and on 2nd January 1943, some 1,200 miles W.N.W. of Capetown, sank the British *Empire March* (7,040 tons), the final prey of the cruise. In mid-January 1943 she was ordered to go to Japan, and she again rounded the Cape, traversed the Indian Ocean and made a landfall at Bali (her first sight of land for 324 days) on 7th February. She reached Kobe on 3rd March.

Two other raiders operated in the Indian Ocean in the closing months of 1942. These were the Japanese *Hokoku Maru* and *Aikoku Maru* which returned to Penang for refit in July after capturing *Hauraki* and reappeared on the Indian Ocean traffic lanes in November. Their initial cruise was not very successful. Their second was to be less so for them, but was to be outstanding as the reason for one of the most remarkable actions of the war.

Last of the four corvettes built in Australian yards for the Royal Indian Navy during the war, H.M.I.S. *Bengal*<sup>6</sup>—of 650 tons, armed with one 12-pounder gun—was launched at Cockatoo Island in May 1942, completed two months later, and on 5th August, manned by the Royal Indian Navy, commissioned under Lieut-Commander W. J. Wilson, R.I.N.R. On 5th November she sailed from Fremantle, escorting the Netherlands tanker *Ondina* (6,200 tons) to Diego Garcia, in the Chagos Archipelago, whence *Ondina* would proceed to Abadan, and *Bengal* to Colombo.

In the afternoon of 11th November 1942, N.O.I.C. Fremantle reported to the Naval Board a signal received from *Bengal*: "We are being shelled my position 19 degrees 38 minutes South 93 degrees 05 minutes East. 0543Z 11th." The position given was about 1,400 miles north-west of Fremantle, and the time at ship approximately 11.45 a.m. Two subsequent signals from *Bengal* reported that she was still in contact with the enemy, and "raider burning strongly aft"; and at 3.58 p.m. on the 11th, local time, N.O.I.C. Fremantle signalled *Bengal*: "Report your present condition and the ship with whom you departed." *Bengal*'s reply, received via

<sup>4</sup> *Thor* met her end in Yokohama Harbour on 30th November 1942, when the tanker *Uckermark* (originally the *Altmark*), lying alongside her, caught fire and blew up, damaging *Thor* beyond repair. Also sunk on this occasion as a result of *Uckermark*'s explosion was *Thor*'s first Indian Ocean victim, *Nankin*, now renamed *Loltan*. Three of *Thor*'s five Indian Ocean ships were tankers plying between Australia and Abadan, two of them loaded and Australia bound.

<sup>5</sup> Jochen Brennecke, *Das Grosse Abenteuer Deutsche Hilfskreuzer 1939-45* (1958), p. 452. The sinking of the British *Reynolds* (5,113 tons) on 2nd November is also attributed to *Michel*. But her loss is officially credited to a submarine.

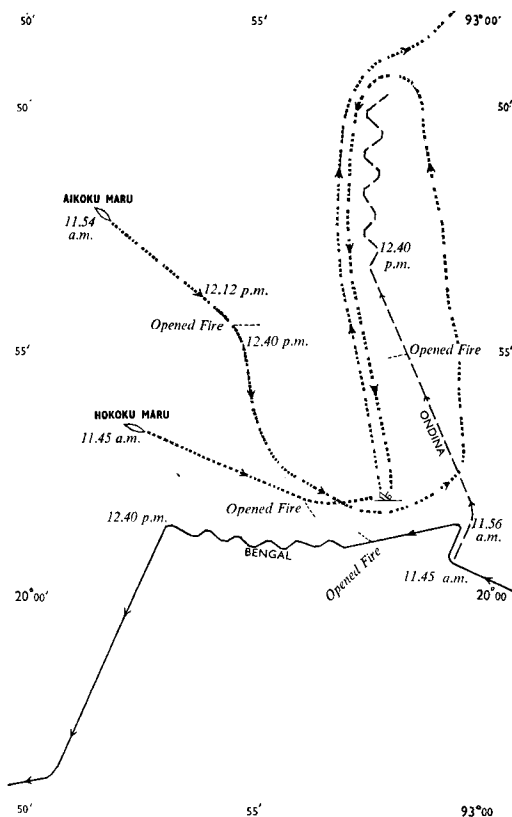
<sup>6</sup> HMIS *Bengal*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 12-pdr gun, 15½ kts.

Colombo three hours later, was: "Holed on waterline fore and aft. Proceeding at nine knots. Tanker hit and presumed lost. One enemy raider believed sunk other not hit." At 9.56 p.m., local time, H.M.S. *Kanimbla*, then in Fremantle, was sailed to the scene of action. The partial picture provided by *Bengal's* signals was added to some 50 hours later when Colombo wireless station received a plain language signal from *Ondina*: "Want immediate medical assistance." No signal giving ship's position or other relevant information was received from her, though asked for by N.O.I.C. Fremantle. The reason, as subsequently transpired, was that

the position of the ship was erased from the chart before abandoning ship, the N.C.S.O. data were destroyed. There was no certainty that future N.C.S.O. positions were compromised. Our course was known in Fremantle. To send our position in plain language was not considered.<sup>7</sup>

Then, at 7.45 a.m. on 17th November (on which day *Bengal* arrived at Diego Garcia) a Catalina aircraft on reconnaissance flight reported sighting *Ondina* 220 miles N.W. by N. of Rott-nest Island. She reached Fremantle next morning. And from the reports from the two ships, this account of the engagement was drawn.

On 11th November 1942, in approximate position 20 degrees south, 93 degrees east, *Bengal*, 400 yards ahead, led *Ondina* at 10 knots on course N.W. by W.  $\frac{1}{2}$  W. *Bengal* had a total of 40 rounds of ammunition for her 12-pounder gun. *Ondina*, a motor ship with a maximum speed of 11 knots, was in ballast except for 150 tons of fuel oil for *Bengal*, and 240 tons consigned to Abadan. She was defensively armed with one 4-inch Q.F. (U.S.N.) gun. Her gun's crew consisted of Able Seaman Hammond,<sup>8</sup>



11th November 1942

<sup>7</sup> Report of *Ondina's* wireless operator.

<sup>8</sup> Ldg Seaman B. A. G. Hammond, DSM, PA1318; RANR. *Ondina*, Michael L. Embericos, *Arkaba*. Of Adelaide; b. Norwood, SA, 6 Feb 1918.



three gunners of the Royal Artillery, four R.N. seamen; and one Dutch merchant service gunlayer.

The weather was fine, clear and windless; the sea calm; visibility good. At about 11.45 a.m. a ship—subsequently identified as *Hokoku Maru*—was sighted bearing W.N.W., almost dead ahead, distant eight miles, and steering E.S.E.<sup>9</sup> *Bengal* went to action stations, and at 11.50 altered course to N.N.E. and ordered *Ondina* to take station on her starboard beam. Nine minutes after the initial sighting, *Bengal* sighted a second ship (*Aikoku Maru*) bearing N.W.½W. distant 10 miles, steering S.E. by E. *Bengal* signalled a rendezvous for next day and ordered *Ondina* to proceed independently, and at 11.56 altered course to W. by S. “straight for the first vessel sighted”. *Ondina* also altered course four points “on a northerly course”. Lieut-Commander Wilson later told the Flag Officer, Ceylon, that his signal to *Ondina* to act independently was made

with the intention that she should make good her escape and that he was disappointed to observe that she altered course only 90 degrees instead of 180 degrees. . . . His prompt decision to steer at full speed directly towards the larger of the two enemy ships in sight was made solely with a view to giving the *Ondina* time to get away; he had little hope that his ship could survive against such odds.<sup>1</sup>

At 12.12 *Hokoku Maru* opened fire on *Bengal* at approximately 3,500 yards, from a position fine on *Bengal*'s starboard bow. *Bengal* returned the fire, and *Aikoku Maru*, some six miles to the north-westward, altered course to the southward to intercept. *Bengal*'s opening round (according to *Ondina*'s report) was short, and *Ondina* opened fire on *Hokoku Maru* at 8,000 yards. “First salvo was over, correction minus 400. Second shot was short. The fifth shot was a hit on the stern, which caused an enormous explosion there, a yellow-red flame was visible and a heavy bottom part of the stern fell burning into the sea.”<sup>2</sup> Both *Ondina* and *Bengal* claimed this scoring hit (which decided the outcome of the action) on *Hokoku Maru*. “The Japanese account says that *Ondina* hit the first raider, but the *Bengal*'s report is emphatic that it was her own gunfire which did the damage.”<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile *Aikoku Maru* also opened fire on *Bengal*. Up to this time *Ondina* had not been fired on, but after being hit *Hokoku Maru* (which had considerably slowed down) divided her fire, her port guns engaging *Ondina*, her starboard *Bengal*. The corvette received a direct hit forward,

<sup>9</sup> *Ondina*'s report of the sighting was: “At 11.25 two ships appeared at one point forward of the port beam, bearing SW½W, steering NNE. Estimated speed 16-20 knots” (from reports submitted by First and Second Officers of *Ondina*, and Naval Intelligence interrogation of the Acting Chief Engineer and Able Seaman Hammond). The discrepancy in times persists throughout the respective reports of the engagement. It is possible that the discrepancy in sighting bearings (“almost dead ahead”, *Bengal*; “one point forward of the port beam”, *Ondina*) was due to the *Ondina*'s bearing being subsequent to the initial alteration of course to N.N.E.

<sup>1</sup> Supplement to *The London Gazette*, 12 July 1948, p. 4013.

<sup>2</sup> The explosion also threw “the debris of the two planes housed on the after deck into the air, and a fierce fire resulted”. Able Seaman Hammond, from close examination of *Aikoku Maru* when she approached *Ondina* after that ship had “abandoned ship”, said that she had “two seaplanes on catapults on the after well deck . . . torpedo tubes mounted on the after well deck starboard and port sides between the guns”. *Hokoku Maru* also had “both her airplanes on the after well deck”. Each raider mounted six 6-inch guns, with a four-gun broadside.

<sup>3</sup> Roskill, Vol II, p. 272n.

and *Ondina* had her captain's gig shot overboard, and her masthead and main wireless aerial shot down. *Ondina* claimed, at this stage, "five hits in rapid succession on *Hokoku Maru's* bridge, midship structure, and stern, causing a violent explosion which blew off the raider's stern and she began to sink".

The relative positions of the ships about half an hour after the action started were, apparently, *Ondina* to the north-eastward, zigzagging between N. and N.N.E. at her maximum speed of 11 knots. *Hokoku Maru* some five miles to the southward of *Ondina*, damaged and stopped. *Bengal* some three miles to the westward of *Hokoku Maru*, steering westerly, and not engaging *Hokoku Maru* since that target was too far aft to train on to; and *Aikoku Maru* some four miles to the northward of *Bengal*, attacking, but keeping to 7,000-8,000 yards range.

*Bengal* now altered course to S.S.W. About this time she received a second direct hit, in the stern. Her ammunition was nearly exhausted. *Aikoku Maru* was in chase and firing. *Ondina* appeared to Wilson to be getting away to the northward, so he decided to break off the engagement and retire behind smoke, which he did, gradually altering to the west and north-west.

*Aikoku Maru* now shifted her attention to *Ondina*. She rounded the sinking *Hokoku Maru* to the eastward, gave chase to *Ondina*, and opened fire at 4,000 yards. *Ondina*, with only twelve rounds left, had been holding her fire. Now, thinking that *Hokoku Maru* was again attacking, she fired four rounds at her, and the remaining eight at *Aikoku Maru*, without scoring any hits. She herself received six direct hits from *Aikoku Maru's* fire, and *Bengal*, away to the south-westward, recorded at 1.8 p.m.: "Tanker observed hit abaft bridge." Soon after, with no ammunition remaining, *Ondina's* master, Captain W. Horsman, stopped engines and ordered "Abandon Ship". A few seconds later he was killed when *Aikoku Maru* made a direct hit on the bridge. The ship was abandoned, the crew of 56 got away in three minutes in three lifeboats and two rafts. *Aikoku Maru* cruised close alongside and fired two torpedoes into *Ondina's* starboard side from about 350 yards, rounded her, opened fire with machine-guns on the boats, and killed the chief engineer and three of the Chinese crew. *Hokoku Maru* sank about this time, and her consort steamed to the scene of the sinking, presumably to rescue survivors. After about twenty minutes she returned to *Ondina*, fired a third torpedo at the port side of the tanker which missed, and then made off to the north-east.

*Ondina* and her boats and rafts were thus left in sole possession of the battle area. The ship had a heavy list to starboard (the torpedoes holed Nos. 2 and 3 tanks) and appeared in imminent danger of sinking. But her Second Officer, Third Engineer, Able Seaman Hammond, Gunner Ryan, R.A., and three of the Chinese crew, boarded her, found the engines intact, got the rest of the crew on board, raised steam, righted the ship, and at 9 p.m. got under way for Fremantle.

The episode closed the careers of these two Japanese ships as raiders. *Kanimbla*, patrolling in the area of their final encounter, reported, at 8 p.m. on 18th November (the day *Ondina* reached Fremantle) hearing a raider alarm signal broadcast in the vicinity. But she sighted nothing, and there was no evidence of any later activity by *Aikoku Maru* in the Indian Ocean.<sup>4</sup> On the conclusion of her patrol, *Kanimbla* proceeded to Colombo, whence she escorted convoy "SU5" to Fremantle, and reached there on 30th December.

#### IV

There was one more surface encounter in the Indian Ocean in which Australian ships were concerned. The occasion was the interception, on 28th November, of the German blockade runner *Ramses*. A motor ship of 7,983 tons, *Ramses* left Hamburg on an ordinary trading voyage on 1st July 1939. She reached Shanghai on 25th August 1939, and remained in the Pacific—the greater part of the time lying in Yokohama, serving as a prison ship for raider prisoners—until November 1942. On the 23rd of that month she sailed from Batavia fully loaded, mainly with rubber and whale oil, to run the blockade to Bordeaux. She passed through Sunda Strait into the Indian Ocean, which she was to traverse "from raider to raider". She would navigate the Atlantic "from U-boat to U-boat", and would approach the European coast under an aircraft screen. Unarmed except for some anti-aircraft machine-guns, she relied for her protection on a constant and keen lookout and evasive action were any ship sighted. If this failed, scuttling charges were in position for immediate self-destruction. Her speed was approximately 11 knots.

On the day that *Ramses* sailed from Batavia, the corvettes H.M.A. Ships *Cessnock*<sup>5</sup> (Lieutenant Marchington<sup>6</sup>) and *Toowoomba* (Lieut-Commander Simpson<sup>7</sup>) left Fremantle for Diego Garcia on their way to join the Eastern Fleet. The British tanker *Goldmouth* (7,402 tons) was in company. Next day H.M.A.S. *Adelaide* (Captain Esdaile<sup>8</sup>) and the Netherlands cruiser *Jacob van Heemskerck* left Fremantle escorting convoy "OW1"<sup>9</sup> to the limits of the Australia Station, where they were to hand over to H.M.S. *Gambia* for onward passage. On 26th November the corvettes and *Goldmouth* joined forces with *Adelaide* and her convoy, and the group proceeded N.W. by W at 9½ knots, with *Adelaide* and *Jacob van Heemskerck* in station 35 degrees on the port and starboard bows respectively of the convoy's wing ships, and *Cessnock* and *Toowoomba*

<sup>4</sup> *Aikoku Maru* ultimately met her end on 17th February 1944, when she was sunk by American aircraft in the carrier raid on Truk.

<sup>5</sup> HMAS *Cessnock*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>6</sup> Lt-Cdr T. S. Marchington, DSC, RD; RANR. HMAS *Bingera* 1940-41; comd HMAS's *Cessnock* 1942-44, *Burdekin* 1944-46. Of Sydney; b. Doyleysden, England, 19 Dec 1906.

<sup>7</sup> Lt-Cdr J. H. Simpson, RD; RANR. HMAS's *Sydney* 1939-41, *Adelaide* 1941-42; comd HMAS *Toowoomba* 1942-45; HMAS *Manoora* 1945. Master mariner; of Sydney; b. Ayr, Scotland, 19 Feb 1905.

<sup>8</sup> Capt J. C. D. Esdaile, CBE; RAN. (1917-18: HMAS *Australia*). Comd HMAS *Adelaide* 1942-44; NOIC New Guinea 1944-45. B. Bendigo, Vic, 3 Oct 1899.

<sup>9</sup> Convoy "OW1", of three ships: *Tarakan* (8,183 tons), *Tatra* (4,766 tons), *Agovi Prince*, with oil refinery equipment for Abadan.

on the port and starboard beams respectively of the convoy. At 2.16 p.m. *Adelaide's* masthead lookout sighted a ship fine on the port bow. *Adelaide* and *Jacob van Heemskerck* proceeded to investigate, leaving the corvettes with the convoy. Six minutes after being sighted<sup>1</sup> *Ramses*—for it was she—altered course away, and shortly broadcast a “raider” distress signal in the name of *Taiyang*—“followed by suspicious craft”. *Adelaide* went to action stations—range then 15,000 yards. *Ramses* made no answer to various visual and wireless signals sent to her, but was seen to lower two boats. At 3.43 “an explosion was observed aft in the ship and almost immediately a dense cloud of smoke appeared at the stern and covered the whole of the port side, leaving only the masts and top of the funnel visible”. Esdaile at once opened fire, on the assumption that one of two things had happened: the ship was an armed raider, had sent away a “panic party” in boats and started a smoke screen to hide preparations for an attack on *Adelaide*; or the ship was unarmed, had blown scuttling charges, and had abandoned ship. “The answer in both cases,” said Esdaile in his report, “was considered to be to open fire, (a) for obvious reasons, and (b) to hasten the end and enable me to get back to the convoy which by this time was hull down”. Fire, which was opened at 3.44 p.m. at 10,600 yards, ceased at 3.52 p.m., at which time *Ramses* suddenly sank by the stern. *Adelaide* picked up survivors before rejoining the convoy to which *Jacob van Heemskerck* (who had also opened fire on *Ramses*) had proceeded as soon as *Ramses* sank. There were no casualties—other than *Ramses* herself—on either side as the result of this encounter. The survivors picked up by *Adelaide* comprised 78 Germans, 10 Norwegians from ships *Aust*, 5,630 tons (sunk by *Thor* on 3rd April 1942) and *Kattegat*, 4,245 tons (sunk by *Michel* on 20th May 1942) also “one pig and one dog”.

Five days after *Adelaide's* encounter with a blockade runner, another Australian ship, *Quickmatch*, had a similar experience, though not in the Indian Ocean. *Quickmatch* was one of the escorts of a south-bound convoy, “KMF4”, from the United Kingdom for the North African invasion operations then in progress. At 2 p.m. on 1st December 1942, out in the Atlantic about 500 miles west of Cape Finisterre, *Quickmatch* and H.M.S. *Redoubt*<sup>2</sup> were ordered by Senior Officer Escort, *Egret*,<sup>3</sup> to close and investigate an unknown ship sighted 15 miles ahead of the convoy. First on the scene, *Rhoades*, in *Quickmatch*, ordered her not to scuttle. The stranger hoisted the Swedish ensign, stopped, and said she was the Swedish *Nanking* bound for Buenos Aires. Ordered to lower a boat and send papers for inspection, while the two destroyers circled her with guns and tubes bearing, she

<sup>1</sup> “The importance of a good masthead lookout,” Esdaile noted in his subsequent report, “was the main lesson learnt from this encounter. It is understood from survivors that *Adelaide* was not sighted from *Ramses* until some time after *Heemskerck* and ships of the convoy. This is attributed to the comparative invisibility of *Adelaide's* foretopmast (including crow'snest, wireless and signal yards) which is painted a pale duck egg green.”

<sup>2</sup> HMS *Redoubt*, destroyer (1942), 1,705 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>3</sup> HMS *Egret*, sloop (1938), 1,200 tons, eight 4-in AA guns, 19½ kts. Sunk off Portugal, 27 Aug 1943.

replied that the weather was unsuitable. Rhoades told her, by loud hailer, to "get on with it". She then struck her colours, hoisted the white flag, and lowered a boat which closed *Quickmatch*, who embarked her Italian crew of one officer and six men. The ship proved to be the Italian *Cortellazzo* (5,292 tons) bound from Bordeaux to Japan with nine German passengers and 2,000 tons of machinery. She was ordered to abandon ship, which she did, and *Redoubt* picked up the remainder of her company—one German was lost owing to the prevailing bad weather—and sank her by torpedo and gunfire. "The Italian prisoners of war," Rhoades recorded, "seemed very pleased to be picked up, and furnished all the information desired, which is scanty due to language difficulties."

## V

On the day that *Quickmatch* had her blockade runner experience, her sister ship *Quiberon*<sup>4</sup> was also involved in an incident which was, like that of *Quickmatch*, coincidental to the North African operations. As stated above, in July the British in Egypt established themselves firmly in defensive positions at El Alamein, what time they built up their strength. As also stated earlier, by June 1942 President Roosevelt, against the views of those urging a "second front" in the Pacific, leaned towards Churchill's concept of the occupation of the whole of North Africa as the "second front" effort—and the maximum that could be made—for 1942. On 24th July agreement was reached between the Allies with regard to the North African operations. Landings were to be effected both on the Atlantic coast at Casablanca, and in the Mediterranean as near as possible to the Tunisian frontier. The American General Eisenhower was appointed Supreme Commander with an American deputy, and an American chief of staff leading a combined Anglo-American staff. The fighting commanders of the advance task forces in the Mediterranean were British—Lieut-General Anderson<sup>5</sup> on land and Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham on sea. For the Casablanca landing the American General George S. Patton commanded the land forces, and Vice-Admiral H. K. Hewitt, U.S.N., the sea.

The operation entailed a great extent and detail of planning, organisation, and training. Naval forces and troopships had to be allocated, convoys arranged, ports of departure decided, and ships concentrated. On the British side:

Our orders involved the sailing, routeing, exact timing, and arrival at their respective landing places inside the Mediterranean at Oran and Algiers of two advance convoys of some 45 ships, to be followed by a main body of more than 200 vessels with 100 escorts carrying some 38,500 British and American troops of the first flights with all their impedimenta. Over and above this the orders laid down the movements and duties of all the purely naval forces inside the Mediterranean, which,

<sup>4</sup> HMAS *Quiberon*, destroyer (1942), 1,705 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>5</sup> General Sir Kenneth Anderson, KCB, MC. Comd 11 Bde, 3 Div, VIII and II Corps, First Army, 1942-43; GOC-in-C East Africa Comd 1945-46. B. 25 Dec 1891. Died 29 Apr 1959.

apart from more than 100 vessels at Gibraltar, meant another 176 vessels of all types from battleships and aircraft carriers to submarines, sloops, corvettes and motor launches.<sup>6</sup>

All else, in the handling of this armada, depended on the safe passage of rather more than 400 ships through the Straits of Gibraltar—only eight miles wide—within a limited period of time. And the shores of the Strait were those of neutral Spain and Spanish Morocco, with British Gibraltar as the hinge pin. It was this narrow entry into an enclosed sea wherein were an enemy “fleet in being” and other powerful hostile forces and influences that caused the Americans strongly to oppose the Mediterranean side of the proposed operation, and to offer resistance thereto which took much British effort to overcome.

At the end of July 1942, as a result of discussions in London between President Roosevelt's representatives—Mr Harry L. Hopkins, General Marshall, and Admiral King—and Mr Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff, the North African operation TORCH was decided upon. Early next month changes were made in the Middle East command. General Alexander succeeded General Auchinleck as Commander-in-Chief, and General Montgomery<sup>7</sup> became the Eighth Army's commander. During the junction days of August and September—the two last and two first of the respective months—Rommel made his final thrust against the Eighth Army, with Egypt as the prize, and was repulsed with heavy losses at the battle of Alam el Halfa.

On 22nd September the date of TORCH was fixed for 8th November, and plans went forward for that date. Complementary to those plans was a successful attack by the Eighth Army, and the driving of Rommel from Egypt as a prelude to the Allied landings farther west. That attack—in which the 9th Australian Division took part—opened in the full moon of the night of 23rd October. On 4th November, General Alexander could report to Churchill:

After twelve days of heavy and violent fighting the Eighth Army has inflicted a severe defeat on the German and Italian forces under Rommel's command.

By sundown on 7th November, on the eve of the Allied landings in North Africa, Rommel's rearguard was nearly 200 miles west of the battlefield in the full ebb of retreat at the Libyan frontier, across which the main stream of his transport was flowing. And “as the rain fell steadily in Egypt all that Saturday”<sup>8</sup> the Mediterranean TORCH assault convoys and their escorts steamed eastward through the sea they were soon to open again to the Allies, and that night descended southward in two streams

<sup>6</sup> Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 475.

(The American convoy and escorts which crossed the Atlantic for the Moroccan landings totalled 102 ships, ranging from battleships to destroyers and included 35 large transports, cargo ships and tankers, five aircraft carriers, more than 40 destroyers, among other ships. There were some 70,000 men in the armada, of which some 35,000 were troops for the landings. See S. E. Morison, *Operations in North African Waters* (1947), p. 17 *et seq.*, Vol II in the series.)

<sup>7</sup> Field Marshal Viscount Montgomery, KG, GCB, DSO. Comd 3 Div, V Corps, XII Corps, 1939-41, Eighth Army 1942-43, Twenty-First Army Group 1944-45; CIGS War Office 1946-48. B. 17 Nov 1887.

<sup>8</sup> Bryant, p. 518.

upon the respective targets, Oran and Algiers. The last named capitulated in the evening of the 8th. Oran surrendered two days later, and on 11th November Morocco—where the Americans landed on the 8th—also submitted. On the 11th and 12th further Mediterranean landings were made at Bougie, Djidjelli, and Bone, to the east of Algiers. Bone became the advanced supply base for the First Army and also the base for the 12th Cruiser Squadron (Force "Q") whose main task, under the command of Rear-Admiral Harcourt,<sup>9</sup> was preying upon the enemy's sea communications with Bizerta and Tunis some 130 miles to the eastward. It comprised the cruisers *Aurora*, *Argonaut*, *Sirius*,<sup>1</sup> and destroyers *Quentin*, and H.M.A.S. *Quiberon* which had commissioned on 6th July 1942, under Commander H. W. S. Browning, R.N.

On 28th November *Quiberon* contributed towards the total of six enemy submarines in whose destruction Australian ships played a part during the war, when, with *Quentin* and R.A.F. fighter aircraft, she shared in the sinking of the Italian *Dessie*<sup>2</sup> off Algiers. Three days later she was at sea with Force "Q" when, around midnight on 1st December an enemy supply convoy of four ships, with Italian destroyer escort, was intercepted about 40 miles north of Cape Bon. In an action which lasted about one hour, and in which enemy ships were engaged at point-blank range in "a ghastly scene of ships exploding and bursting into flame amidst clouds of steam and smoke; of men throwing themselves overboard as their ships sank. and motor vehicles carried on deck sliding and splashing into the sea as vessels capsized",<sup>3</sup> the four ships of the convoy and one escorting destroyer<sup>4</sup> were sunk. The action started at about half an hour after midnight. At 1.35 a.m. on the 2nd December *Quiberon* fired the last salvos of the engagement at a capsized enemy destroyer. One minute later Force "Q" was on course W by S½S, making for Bone at 27 knots—with four burning ships in sight, the last of which was still visible astern half an hour later.

The passage to Bone was without incident until 5.30 p.m. on the 2nd, when aircraft were heard overhead. About an hour later *Quentin*, ahead of *Quiberon* in the line, was torpedoed by a torpedo bomber which came in from the port side. The British destroyer was fatally damaged, and *Quiberon* went alongside her and removed her complement while both ships were under air attack, and herself narrowly escaped direct hits during the operation. While he was alongside *Quentin*, Browning later reported,

I was bombed and cannoned. H.M.A.S. *Quiberon* got clear just as a stick of bombs fell where she had been; the explosions were under my forecandle. Ship went on to

<sup>9</sup> Admiral Sir Cecil Harcourt, GBE, KCB; RN. Director of Operations Div 1939-41; comd HMS *Duke of York* 1941-42, 10th, 12th and 15th Cruiser Sqns 1942-44; Naval Secretary to First Lord of the Admiralty 1944-45; comd 11th Aircraft Carrier Sqn 1945. B. 11 Apr 1892. Died 19 Dec 1959.

<sup>1</sup> HMS's *Argonaut* and *Sirius*, cruisers (1940-42), 5,450 tons, ten 5.25-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

<sup>2</sup> *Dessie*, Italian submarine (1936), 620 tons, one 3.9-in gun, two 13-mm AA guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 14 kts. Sunk off Algiers, 28 Nov 1942.

<sup>3</sup> Cunningham, p. 505.

<sup>4</sup> One of the escorting destroyers was *Lupo*, who had figured with distinction in a similar night action against British forces in the Aegean when escorting the German Maleme flotilla from Milos to Crete on 21st-22nd May 1941. (See *Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942*, pp. 344-5.)

full speed and was attacked six more times by low-level bombing, dive-bombing, and one abortive attempt by torpedo-bombing aircraft. Sticks of bombs all fell fairly close, but thanks to good gunnery and high speed I was able to alter course as necessary after seeing the bombs begin to fall.

This was one of a number of incidents in which the TORCH naval forces were involved in the vital problem of maintaining sea communications in the face of powerful enemy air and submarine activity. While the Axis had air strength in Tunisia, large personnel ships could not be risked east of Algiers, and reinforcements and supplies had to be sent to Bone in small coastal ships escorted by destroyers. "All these convoys," the Commander-in-Chief later recalled, "had to be fought through, and no passage was without incident." The submarine menace was omnipresent, and referring to "our constant battle against the U-boats", Admiral Cunningham recorded the work done by "among others, the destroyers *Quentin, Quiberon, Wheatland, Easton, Bicester* and *Lamerton*".<sup>5</sup>

But by the end of December, the general situation for the Allies was much brighter than it had been twelve months earlier. Then British naval forces in the Mediterranean were at their lowest ebb; Malta was once more in serious jeopardy. In the Middle East Russia was holding along the Don and in the Crimea, but the German threat after winter loomed starkly. In the Far East the Japanese had struck and were rising swiftly to the crest of their initial unbroken successes. Now, in the Mediterranean the Allied naval forces were at their peak; and on land the Allied armies were driving the enemy before them in Cyrenaica, and pressing them hard in Tunisia and Algeria. In the Middle East the Russians had launched a great and successful offensive at Stalingrad. And in the Far East the Japanese were being forced from the offensive to the defensive. But the flood was only beginning to make. Much yet remained to be done before it lifted Allied hopes and achievements to high-water mark. It was March 1943, Cyrenaica and Tripolitania once more in British hands, before convoys were able to reach Malta from Alexandria. And two more months passed before the great Mediterranean prize was won—the ability to use that sea for passage to the Middle East and Indian Ocean, instead of being forced to the long haul round the Cape of Good Hope. The first through convoy passed Gibraltar on 17th May 1943, and reached Alexandria nine days later.

## VI

The "constant battle against the U-boats" referred to by Admiral Cunningham intensified in the second half of 1942 in the Indian Ocean and on the "round the Cape" route to the Middle East. As stated above, Ishizaki's submarines continued operations in the Mozambique Channel in July, after which they returned to their base at Penang. Japanese submarines during the first six months of the year operated in both the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. In the second half of the year they extended operations

<sup>5</sup> *Wheatland, Easton, Bicester, Lamerton*, British destroyers (1940-41), 904 tons, four 4-in AA guns, 27½ kts.



westward into the Gulf of Aden and northward to the approaches to the Persian Gulf, where they increased their activities with the ending of the south-west monsoon. The attacks on the round the Cape traffic were carried out by German U-boats, initially off Capetown but later reaching into the Indian Ocean to the Mozambique Channel. In operations against both the Japanese and German submarines, ships of the R.A.N. were employed.

The growing menace from the Japanese submarines to Persian Gulf traffic—carrying oil, aid to Russia, and British and American military cargoes—led to the establishment, in August 1942, of a convoy system for its protection. In 1942 the tonnage of aid-to-Russia cargoes which could be landed in the Persian Gulf was largely limited by the capacity of the ports, which had to be used while they were being constructed or developed; by the paucity of lifting appliances; and by the high proportion of heavy and difficult cargoes, including locomotives, railway waggons, steel rails and sheets, and so on. In September, 39,000 tons of cargo for Russia were landed, and the figures for the last three months of 1942 were 50,000, 35,000, and 37,000 tons respectively. But in 1943, with the improvement in port facilities, the figures jumped. Aid-to-Russia cargoes totalled 53,000 tons in January of that year, and 83,000 tons in February. And illustrating the swift growth in importance of the Persian Gulf communications, the cargo for Russia cleared in 1943 from Basra, Abadan, Khorramshahr and Bandar Shapur, totalled 1,608,330 tons, and in addition another 1,002,739 tons of British and American military cargoes were cleared from those ports. In the search for escort vessels for the Persian Gulf convoys, by the end of 1943 only one (*Gawler*<sup>6</sup>) of the thirteen Australian corvettes serving with the Eastern Fleet was not at one time or another allocated to this duty.<sup>7</sup> Three of them—*Geraldton*, *Bathurst*, *Lismore*—were on Persian Gulf convoy escort work in 1942.

First of the Australian corvettes to be commissioned, *Bathurst* (5th December 1940) and *Lismore* (24th January 1941) joined the East Indies Station on 5th June 1941. The second half of that year they spent in the Red Sea in the Gulf of Aden area, leaving there in mid-December for Colombo, where they arrived on the 29th. For most of the first half of 1942 they escorted in Indian waters, based on Colombo. During the second half of 1942 they were joined by more of the Australian-manned corvettes built for the Admiralty. These left Australia at intervals, in each instance escorting a tanker to Diego Garcia or Addu Atoll on its way to the Persian Gulf to load a cargo of oil. First of the newcomers to the Eastern Fleet was *Geraldton* (Lieut-Commander Harris<sup>8</sup>) which left Fremantle on 26th July, and the others followed in the order *Launceston*

<sup>6</sup> HMAS *Gawler*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>7</sup> The twelve which had Persian Gulf convoy experience were, in the chronological order in which they first did so, *Geraldton*, *Bathurst*, *Lismore*, *Ipswich*, *Cessnock*, *Launceston*, *Maryborough*, *Burnie*, *Tanworth*, *Toowoomba*, *Wollongong*, and *Cairns*.

<sup>8</sup> Cdr H. M. Harris, OBE, RD; RNR. HMAS *Geraldton* and in comd 23rd MS Flotilla 1942-44. Archdeacon of Fiji; b. Regelly, Wales, 23 Feb 1894.

(Lieut-Commander Collins<sup>9</sup>) 4th September; *Wollongong* (Lieutenant G. A. Keith) 14th September; *Burnie* (Lieutenant T. Christy) 27th September; *Cairns* (Lieutenant MacMillan) 16th October; *Maryborough* (Lieut-Commander G. L. Cant) 3rd November; *Ipswich*<sup>1</sup> (Lieut-Commander McBryde<sup>2</sup>) 3rd November; *Toowoomba* (Lieut-Commander Simpson) 23rd November; *Cessnock* (Lieutenant Marchington) 23rd November; and *Gawler* (Lieut-Commander Seymour<sup>3</sup>) 14th December. Also during the second half of 1942 the four ships built for the Royal Indian Navy left Australia to join their own forces, in the order *Punjab* (17th June); *Madras*<sup>4</sup> (4th September); *Bombay* (13th September); and *Bengal* (5th November). The last of the Admiralty group to leave to join the Eastern Fleet, H.M.A.S. *Tamworth*<sup>5</sup> (Lieutenant Deans<sup>6</sup>) left Fremantle on 27th January 1943.

*Geraldton*, escorting the tanker *Bahrein* (7,095 tons) from Fremantle, arrived at Addu Atoll on 8th August, and went thence to Colombo. She left Colombo for Bombay on 25th August but was diverted to search for a submarine which sank the *Harmonides* (5,237 tons) on 25th August, 350 miles south-west of Ceylon. Her search, however—both for the submarine and for survivors from *Harmonides*—was profitless, and on 6th September she sailed from Bombay with her first Persian Gulf convoy, "PB.54".

When, in August 1942, in view of the activity of Japanese submarines in the area, it was decided to establish a convoy organisation for Persian Gulf traffic, Bandar Abbas, on the northern shore of the Strait of Hormuz, the gateway from the Gulf of Oman into the Persian Gulf, was selected as the convoy assembly port. The cruiser H.M.S. *Capetown* was base ship *pro tem*—until the armed merchant cruiser *Alaunia* (14,030 tons) arrived on 10th September and took over duties as Naval Officer-in-Charge, Hormuz. A resident tanker was established at Khor Kuwai, opposite Bandar Abbas, at the tip of the Mussandam Peninsula on the southern, Arabian, side of the 29-mile-wide strait. Khor Kuwai was

a narrow, crooked arm of the sea . . . bounded on one side by the mainland, with high rugged mountains of red rock entirely without vegetation, and on the other by a barren island whose high stony hills support sparse, stunted shrubs and thorny bushes.<sup>7</sup>

Here the escort vessels refuelled, and spent at anchor their periods of rest and refreshment between escorting convoys or doing a spell of duty with

<sup>9</sup> Lt-Cdr P. G. Collins, RANR. Comd HMAS's *Launceston* 1942-44, *Castlemaine* 1944-45. Of Perth, WA; b. Leicester, England, 14 Apr 1901.

<sup>1</sup> HMAS's *Launceston* and *Ipswich*, corvettes (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Cdr J. S. McBryde, RANR. Comd HMAS's *Ipswich* 1942-44, *Kalgoorlie* 1944-45. Master mariner; of Melbourne; b. Port Logan, Scotland, 30 May 1896.

<sup>3</sup> Cdr W. J. Seymour, RAN. HMAS *Westralia* 1940-42; comd HMAS *Gawler* 1942-44. Instructor; of Melbourne; b. Carshalton, England, 7 Apr 1900.

<sup>4</sup> HMIS's *Punjab* and *Madras*, corvettes (1942), 650 tons, one 3-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>5</sup> HMAS *Tamworth*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>6</sup> Lt W. H. Deans, RANR. HMAS *Ipswich* 1942; comd HMAS *Tamworth* 1942-43. Of Newcastle, NSW; b. Glasgow, Scotland, 14 Nov 1900. Died 24 Sep 1943.

<sup>7</sup> J. S. McBryde, in *As You Were*, 1950, p. 69.

the Straits Patrol outside in the Gulf of Oman, on the east side of the Mussandam Peninsula. It was not a salubrious spot, not, despite the romantic associations of the area, "paradise enow". The shade temperature in the Persian Gulf during September 1942 ranged between a maximum of 106 degrees and a minimum of 74, with a relative humidity of 40 degrees. In the walled-in anchorage of Khor Kuwai the conditions were sweltering, and McBryde in *Ipswich* later recalled of his spells there that "the monotony and boredom of a patrol in the Gulf of Oman was often to be preferred to a spell in Khor Kuwai". Yet it had its compensations: those in *Ipswich* found (as did the ships' companies of the other Australian corvettes who were with the Persian Gulf escort groups) that:

the adjacent seas swarmed with fish of every description, the coral shallows of the coast were alive with crayfish, and the tidal rocks of the island were covered with the largest and finest oysters we had ever seen.<sup>8</sup>

Ships with small refrigerator stowage were hard put to it in these conditions, and H.M.S. *Caradoc*<sup>9</sup> (who relieved *Capetown* in the Gulf on 15th October as guard cruiser) noted in her war diary that

some meatless periods are inevitable in the Persian Gulf. On two or three occasions H.M.S. *Alaunia* was able to come to our rescue. Once, a bullock, slaughtered on board by an R.A.N.V.R. officer in the absence of the butcher, provided a supply of meat and a good profit to the Crown. But by far the best larder-stocker was a seine net borrowed from H.M.I.S. *Sutlej*. With it a visit to Henjam, Khassab Bay or Khor Ghubb Ali always provided an ample supply of fresh fish and turtles for the whole ship.

Because of earlier Japanese submarine operations in the Arabian Sea, ships from Bombay and Karachi—as the number of *Geraldton*'s initial convoy indicates—had for some time been sailed in convoy ("BP" convoys) as far as the Strait of Hormuz. Early in September the first experimental convoy outward from the Persian Gulf to Bombay was being assembled at Bandar Abbas when the sinking by a submarine of the British *Gazon* (4,224 tons) in the Gulf of Aden caused it to be split into "PA" (Persian Gulf-Aden) and "PB" (Persian Gulf-Bombay) sections. These parted company east of Ras al Hadd—the easternmost point of Oman and southern portal of the gulf of that name—where ocean-going traffic disengaged and proceeded independently and the Aden and Bombay convoys made for their respective destinations. The system then inaugurated continued, with variations according to the availability of escort vessels and the reported positions of submarines. As "Snop-gee"<sup>1</sup> wrote in his war diary on 21st November 1942: "Naturally, at that stage nothing was as strong as it should have been but, in a somewhat hand to mouth way, it worked." Conditions soon stabilised with Bandar Abbas sending out convoys every five or six days (by the end of October six "PB" and four "PA" convoys had sailed from Bandar Abbas since the inception of the

<sup>8</sup> McBryde, p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> HMS *Caradoc*, cruiser (1917), 4,180 tons, five 6-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 29 kts.

<sup>1</sup> SNOFG, short title for Senior Naval Officer, Persian Gulf.

convoy system in the Persian Gulf), and in September, arising from the appearance of submarines in the Gulf of Aden, in addition to the existing inward "BP" convoys, Aden-Persian Gulf ("AP") convoys were instituted. In the early stages air cover was non-existent, and at the end of September "air escorts in the Gulf of Oman were still embryonic owing to lack of aircraft", but the situation soon improved—partly owing to *Geraldton*.

That ship made her first arrival in the Persian Gulf with "BP.54" on 11th September, and was followed later in the month by *Bathurst* with convoy "BP.56". On 13th September *Geraldton* left Bandar Abbas with an Aden convoy, "PA.2", and was returning with a convoy from that port when, on 29th September, she attacked a strong submarine contact in the Gulf of Oman, but without tangible result so far as the submarine was concerned. There were, however, repercussions, and in October "Snop-gee" reported:

As a result of *Geraldton*'s depth-charge attack on 29th September, 18 Bisleys arrived as air reinforcements. These are based on Sharjah with an advance base at Ras al Hadd. Three Catalinas arrived about 14th October, and are based on Bahrein, with Ras al Hadd as an advanced base. All incoming ships from west of 62 E. and south of 22 N. now pass within 60 miles of Ras al Hadd and a tram line from there to the Strait is patrolled by aircraft. Outgoing convoys have air escort until clear of Ras al Hadd.

For the remainder of 1942 *Geraldton* and *Bathurst* (Lieut-Commander MacDonald<sup>2</sup>) were with Persian Gulf convoys. *Lismore* escorted "BP.61" of twelve ships in December. The rest of the corvettes as they joined the Eastern Fleet from Australia were allotted to other escorting work, with occasionally a special task. *Launceston* initially reached Colombo from Diego Garcia on 24th September, and was employed escorting between that port and Addu Atoll. In the late afternoon of 13th October the ship *Martaban* (4,161 tons) was torpedoed, set on fire, and abandoned by her crew, off the south-east coast of Ceylon. *Launceston* was one of three ships—the others were H.M.S. *Aster*<sup>3</sup> and H.M.I.S. *Netravati* (1,540 tons)—which "took part together with a considerable number of Catalinas and other aircraft" in operations to save the stricken ship and her company. By the time she was taken in tow by *Aster*, *Martaban* had drifted about 250 miles in a strong north-east current to a position 240 miles east of Trincomalee, at which port *Aster* arrived with her on 21st October. Sixty-one of *Martaban*'s crew of 64 were rescued from the lifeboats in which they abandoned ship by *Launceston*, who picked up two boats in the vicinity of *Martaban* when she was taken in tow, and by *Netravati* who picked up the other two boats only 40 miles from where the ship was torpedoed, and 200 miles from *Launceston*'s two. In both instances the lifeboats were first found by Catalina aircraft.

A Catalina was responsible for a short but unremunerative operation

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Cdr C. MacDonald, RANR. Comd HMAS's *Bathurst* 1942-44, *Bundaberg* 1944-45. Tug master; of Newcastle, NSW; b. Glasgow, Scotland, 28 Nov 1904. Lt-Cdr MacDonald succeeded Lt-Cdr A. V. Bunyan in command of *Bathurst* on 18th October 1942.

<sup>3</sup> HMS *Aster*, corvette (1941), 925 tons, one 4-in AA gun, 17 kts.

in which two of the Australian ships took part a few days later, in another Force "Q" whose formation and brief career shortly antedated that of Rear-Admiral Harcourt's Force "Q" in the Mediterranean. On the morning of 30th October a Catalina cruising westerly from Addu Atoll sighted a homeward-bound submarine which seemed to be making for the channel between Addu Atoll and the Chagos Islands to the south. A hunt was organised in which the hastily-formed Force "Q", comprising H.M. Ships *Fritillary*<sup>4</sup> and *Hoxa*<sup>5</sup> from Addu Atoll, and H.M.A. Ships *Lismore* (who had been anti-submarine escort to a convoy from Colombo to Addu) and *Cairns* (who had just arrived on the station and was making her initial visit to Kilindini after delivering the tanker *Hilda Knudsen*, 9,178 tons, at Diego Garcia) collaborated with a force of Catalinas based on Addu. The operation, which was adversely affected by bad weather and low visibility, produced no results by the evening of 1st November. It was therefore abandoned, and that Force "Q" ceased to exist.

## VII

By the beginning of the second half of 1942 the east coast waters of the United States and the Caribbean, because of the introduction there of the convoy system, were no longer the rewarding hunting ground they had been for German submarines. The main weight of the U-boat attack had to revert to the mid-Atlantic against convoys to and from Britain, and it was with this in view that the German High Command planned future U-boat operations. The increase in the number of boats becoming operational<sup>6</sup> enabled the German planners to detail two groups for operations against Atlantic convoys and at the same time to engage in certain subsidiary operations. These included a sudden surprise onslaught in the area of the Cape. It entailed a voyage of 6,000 miles from base to operational area. In mid-August four large "IXC" boats left Biscay ports for the Cape, accompanied by a "Milch cow" submarine tanker. They were known as the "Polar Bear" group.<sup>7</sup> On 12th September, in mid-ocean some 200 miles north-east of Ascension Island, *U 156* sank the liner *Laconia* (19,695 tons) whose company of 2,664 included 1,800 Italian prisoners of war. When the plight of his Italian allies was discovered, the captain of *U 156* set about rescue operations and at the same time signalled the German Admiralty for instructions. The result was an order from Doenitz to the "Polar Bear" group to break off their Cape operation and help *U 156* in rescue work. The "Polar Bear" boats, excepting *U 156* which was replaced in the group by *U 159*, were released by Doenitz on 14th September to resume the Cape operation, but two boats from the Freetown area carried on in their place, together with Vichy French warships from Dakar.

<sup>4</sup> HMS *Fritillary*, corvette (1941), 925 tons, one 4-in AA gun, 17 kts.

<sup>5</sup> HMS *Hoxa*, minesweeper (1941), 560 tons, one 4-in AA gun.

<sup>6</sup> Admiral Doenitz, *Memoirs* (1959), p. 238. "In July, August and September 1942 the exceptionally high number of thirty new boats per month were ready for operational duties."

<sup>7</sup> "Polar Bear" group comprised *U 68*, *U 504*, *U 172*, and *U 156*, with "milch cow" *U 459*. The "IXC" boats were of 1,120 tons surface displacement, with an endurance of 13,450 miles at 10 knots.

Unfortunately the U-boats, during their rescue work, were bombed by American aircraft. Doenitz, understandably, issued an order directing that survivors of ships sunk were not to be rescued. This, again understandably in view of the detailed instructions in the order, was held against him at the Nuremberg trial as a violation of the Protocol of 1936.<sup>8</sup>

The boats of the "Polar Bear" group, after this brief interruption, reached their operation area at the Cape during the first week in October, simultaneously with the first of a larger type ("IXD2", 1,612 tons surface displacement, 31,500 miles endurance at 10 knots), *U 179* whose greater speed enabled her to overtake the "Polar Bear" group on the run down the South Atlantic. The attack opened on 7th October, and within 24 hours six ships, aggregating 33,000 tons, were sunk within a radius of 100 miles of Table Bay by *U 179*, *U 172*, and *U 68*.

On the day the attack opened, H.M.A.S. *Nizam* arrived at Simonstown from Durban for a refit. Also there for the same purpose was her Eastern Fleet companion *Foxhound*. The Admiralty authorised Vice-Admiral Tait,<sup>9</sup> Commander-in-Chief South Atlantic (whose headquarters were at Capetown), to defer their refits and retain them until reinforcements arrived, and similarly to retain and use the destroyers H.M. Ships *Arrow* and *Active*,<sup>1</sup> which were at Simonstown on their way to Freetown. Meanwhile anti-submarine reinforcements were hastily concentrated at Simonstown, but did not arrive until heavy losses had been suffered.<sup>2</sup>

*Nizam* sailed from Simonstown early on 8th October to search for survivors from the Greek *Koumoundouros* (3,598 tons) sunk by *U 68* about 37 miles S.S.W. of Capetown. She sighted boats during the forenoon, and picked up all survivors by 1 p.m. For the rest of the day she carried out anti-submarine patrol with the other three destroyers. At about 10.40 p.m. the four ships were 65 miles north-west of Capetown, searching in line abreast two miles apart, when *Active* (who shortly before had picked up 99 survivors from the *City of Athens* (6,558 tons), torpedoed that afternoon by *U 504* about 55 miles north-west of Capetown) sighted a large U-boat on the surface. *Active* illuminated by searchlight and successfully attacked, first with gunfire and later, when the submarine dived and passed close down the destroyer's port side, with depth charges. *U 179*, *Active*'s victim, was the first of a total of two enemy submarines

<sup>8</sup> The London Protocol of November 1936 denounced submarine war on merchant shipping—and Germany joined with other Powers in this denunciation at that time. The Doenitz order prohibiting the rescue of survivors, issued on 17th September (the day after *U 156* was bombed) was: "All attempts to rescue the crews of sunken ships will cease forthwith. This prohibition applies equally to the picking up of men in the water and putting them aboard a lifeboat, to the righting of capsized lifeboats and to the supply of food and water. Such activities are a contradiction of the primary object of war, namely, the destruction of enemy ships and their crews." (Doenitz, p. 263.) Brevity, in restriction of this order to its first sentence, would have been better in this instance.

<sup>9</sup> Admiral Sir Campbell Tait, KCB, MVO; RN. Director of Personal Services 1941; C-in-C South Atlantic Station 1942-44; Governor of Southern Rhodesia 1945-46. B. 1886. Died 17 Jul 1946.

<sup>1</sup> HMS's *Arrow* and *Active*, destroyers (1930), 1,350 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

<sup>2</sup> These reinforcements included six destroyers from the Eastern Fleet, among them two more Australian ships, *Norman* and *Nepal*; and a number of anti-submarine trawlers from the United Kingdom and the United States, these last mentioned having been lent to the US Navy Department when the German submarine offensive opened on the American coast at the beginning of the year.

sunk in the immediate Cape area, and the second was not sunk until March 1944.

The opening of the "IXD2"-type submarine attack was thus inauspicious for the attackers. But the four boats of the "Polar Bear" group had a series of successes unmarred by losses on their side. By the end of October they sank 23 ships of 156,230 tons.<sup>3</sup> On the night 8th-9th October, *U 68* sank four ships aggregating 23,861 tons; and on the morning of the 10th *U 172* (who had opened the ball on the 7th by sinking two ships before 9 a.m.) accounted for the largest ship to be sunk in South African waters during the war—*Orcades*, a peacetime regular on the Australian run, of 23,456 tons. *Orcades* had formed part of the first convoy carrying the vanguard of the A.I.F. to the Middle East in early 1940. That day *Nizam*, who had landed the *Koumoundouros* survivors at Capetown on the 9th, and sailed again with *Foxhound* on patrol, picked up survivors from the torpedoed *Gaasterkerk* (8,679 tons) from a raft. In the evening the two destroyers were ordered by Admiral Tait to rendezvous with the Polish ship *Narwick*, which had picked up survivors from *Orcades* some 200 miles south of the Cape. Early in the morning of the 11th *Nizam* sighted and reported a submarine on the surface 150 miles south-west of Table Bay. She and *Foxhound* closed the enemy, and *U 159*—for it was she—crash dived. The two destroyers commenced a search and obtained a contact, when they were ordered to proceed to find *Narwick* and escort her to Capetown. This they did, and reached port on the 12th. On 20th October *Nizam*, after some more anti-submarine patrols in the Cape area, went to Simonstown to resume her delayed refit. This took until 28th December. On its conclusion she returned to the Eastern Fleet.

Meanwhile the six Eastern Fleet destroyers lent to the South Atlantic command arrived in the Cape area. Two days after *Nizam* and *Foxhound* broke off their search for *U 159* and left her to live to fight another day, the submarine—in the afternoon of 13th October—torpedoed and sank *Empire Nomad* (7,167 tons). On 21st October H.M.A.S. *Norman* (Commander H. M. Burrell) picked up one of the torpedoed ship's lifeboats with 15 survivors. And it was *U 159* who, on 29th October, sank the British *Laplace* (7,327 tons). That day *Nepal*, with the R.N. destroyer *Fortune*, sailed from Capetown for a position about 340 miles south of Agulhas to search for a submarine which had been detected in the area. They were diverted to the position of *Laplace* when that ship's submarine alarm broadcast was received. But *Laplace*'s survivors were picked up by *Porto Alegre* (6,105 tons) which herself fell a victim to *U 504* on 3rd November. By now the boats of "Polar Bear" group were turning for home. They had sunk 30 ships, aggregating nearly 200,000 tons. Among the last of their sinkings were those by *U 68* and *U 172* in mid-South Atlantic reaching up towards the tropics on the road to Lorient, where the four boats arrived at intervals of a few days during the period 6th

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<sup>3</sup> Roskill, Vol II, p. 269.

December to 5th January. And with that easing of the situation in the Cape area the Eastern Fleet destroyers returned to the Indian Ocean.

The departure of the "Polar Bear" group was, however, offset by the arrival in southern African waters of the three remaining boats—*U 177*, *U 178*, *U 181*—of the "IXD2" class, and these enjoyed a period of operation which contrasted happily—for them—with the brief operational career of *U 179*. During the last two months of the year the three newcomers harried merchant ships in the Durban-Lourenco Marques area. One of their first victims was the American *Pierce Butler* (7,191 tons) torpedoed by *U 177* about 200 miles east of Durban on 20th November. *Nepal* landed 93 of her survivors at that port. In their period of operations in the southern approaches to the Mozambique Channel these three U-boats sank 20 ships totalling about 102,000 tons. They made November the Indian Ocean's worst month since the Japanese Bay of Bengal incursion the previous April.<sup>4</sup> By December the situation improved somewhat when the arrival of escort vessels enabled the institution of coastal convoys between Capetown and Durban and, in some instances, northward as far as Lourenco Marques. At intervals during December the three U-boats began their homeward passages to their French bases; and none was in the area after Christmas 1942.

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<sup>4</sup> Roskill, Vol II, p. 270. In November 1942 the overall sinkings by U-boats reached the highest total of the war—117 ships of over 700,000 tons. (H. Busch, *U-Boats at War*, 1955, p. 150.)



## CHAPTER 8

### SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC—PRELUDE TO FLOOD TIDE

THE activities of the Australian corvettes and destroyers on anti-submarine work on Australia's far western flank were matched at this period by those of their sister ships operating from Darwin in northern Australian waters. Mention has been made of operations by small ships at Timor in support of the troops carrying on guerilla warfare there, and of the carriage of Dutch troops to the Aru Islands in July. A similar though less successful operation was essayed the same month at the near-by Tanimbar Islands. All of these operations stemmed from the original garrisoning of Ambon and Timor, the loss of those islands to the Japanese and the desire of the Australians and Dutch to do something about the situation.

On 4th May eleven A.I.F. officers and men and six Dutch soldiers who had escaped from Ambon reached Darwin in the lugger *Griffioen* from Saumlaki, in the Tanimbar Islands. They reported that the Tanimbar and Aru Islands were not occupied by the Japanese. Among the A.I.F. officers who reached Darwin, one, Lieutenant Jenkins,<sup>1</sup> escaped from the prisoner-of-war camp at Tan Toey, on the eastern shore of Ambon Bay just north of the town of Ambon, on 17th March. He brought back information that the camp held approximately 1,000 prisoners (800 Australian and 200 Dutch) who were likely, because of the food situation, to be transferred to Formosa about 17th June. Ambon Island was held by some 1,200 to 1,500 Japanese marines, dispersed in five bodies. One of these, of 50 marines, constituted the guard at the camp. The prisoners of war had plans for participation in the event of an Allied attack on the island, and as a result of the information provided by Jenkins, the Director of Plans at Navy Office, Commander Wright,<sup>2</sup> produced a paper "investigating the possibilities of effecting the release" of the prisoners and bringing them to Australia, utilising the Australian destroyer *Arunta*, the Dutch cruiser *Tromp*, and a commando force. The paper concluded that the detailed scheme put forward was practicable. It was approved in principle by the Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, Captain Nichols; was accepted cautiously and with reservations by Rear-Admiral F. W. Coster, commanding the Netherlands Naval Forces in the S.W.P.A.; and was embraced with some enthusiasm by the First Naval Member, Admiral Royle, who recommended it to Comsouwespac, Vice-Admiral Leary, and commented "I don't think the risk to the destroyers is unduly heavy, and it should have an excellent effect on morale."<sup>3</sup> Leary, however, could not approve of any such operation, which seemed to him "entirely impracticable". He

<sup>1</sup> Maj W. T. Jenkins, MBE. 2/21 Bn and "Z" Special Unit. Builder and contractor; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Moreland, Vic. 29 Nov 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Cdr H. C. Wright, DSO; RAN, HMS *Royal Sovereign* 1939-42; Director of Plans, Navy Office 1942-43; HMAS *Australia* 1944-45. B. Boulder City, WA, 22 Feb 1904.

<sup>3</sup> Minute from Royle to Leary and Coster, 3 June 1942.

thought that "we would lose two of our fighting ships and in addition would not add to our prestige by an attempt of this nature".

So the Ambon plan withered on the vine, but other operations, of a less ambitious nature, were carried out or attempted. On 2nd May the Naval Board directed N.O.I.C. Darwin, Commodore C. J. Pope, to arrange for approximately 40 Allied persons to be brought out from Saumlaki. *Warrnambool* was given the mission. She arrived at Saumlaki—some 300 miles north of Darwin on the south-east coast of Jamdena, largest of the Tanimbar group—at 5 p.m. on 5th May. Barron, her commanding officer, landed in the motor-boat and "after having conversation with residents embarked five men, eight women and eleven children, all white", and reached Darwin without incident on the 7th.

*Warrnambool* made a second run to the islands, this time to the Aru group, some 400 miles north-east of Darwin, in July. At 3 a.m. on the 9th, in company with H.M.A.S. *Southern Cross*, she sailed from Darwin. Both ships were loaded with Dutch troops ("Plover" Force) and equipment. They crossed the Arafura Sea during the 10th and 11th—"troops all down with sea-sickness" recorded Barron—and arrived off Dobo, on the west side of Wokam Island, at 2 a.m. on the 12th. At 6.20 a.m. both ships entered harbour and, supported by R.A.A.F. aircraft, landed their troops and gear without opposition. Landings, and the discharging of stores and equipment, were completed by 10.30 a.m. on the 13th, and the ships reached Darwin next day.

*Southern Cross* took part in another operation later in the month when, in company with H.M.A.S. *Chinampa*,<sup>4</sup> an attempt was made at Saumlaki to repeat the operation carried out successfully at Dobo. On this occasion Australian troops were embarked, and the two ships sailed from Darwin on 28th July. Unfortunately, while they were on passage, their arrival at Saumlaki was forestalled by the Japanese, who landed there in some force before dawn on the 30th. Saumlaki's defending force consisted of one sergeant and twelve other ranks of the Netherlands Army, armed with Tommy-guns, a Lewis gun, and hand grenades, and entrenched in a prepared semi-circular position fronting the jetty. At 4.10 a.m. two ships were seen entering harbour, and were presumed to be *Chinampa* and *Southern Cross*, whose arrival was expected. They were, however, Japanese warships, probably large destroyers. Initial landings of approximately 300 men were made from boats on each side of the 1,500-foot jetty. As the enemy, in close formation, reached the shore end of the jetty the defenders opened fire, and the attack was repulsed with heavy Japanese casualties. Other landings were, however, effected some distance south of the jetty, and fire, directed by searchlights, was opened on the defence position from the ships. Six of the defenders were killed and the survivors driven to the bush. At 6 a.m. the town was in Japanese hands, and shortly after the Japanese ships sailed.

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<sup>4</sup> HMAS *Chinampa*, diesel ketch (built 1938; commissioned 1942), 60 tons.

At this time *Chinampa* and *Southern Cross* were still some distance from their destination, and unaware of the enemy's landings. At 9.30 a.m. *Southern Cross* suffered an engine breakdown. *Chinampa* went on alone, entered the harbour, and anchored some distance from the shore. Her commanding officer, Commissioned Warrant Officer Henderson,<sup>5</sup> landed, but was fired on and rejoined his ship to await the arrival of *Southern Cross*. When that ship arrived next morning, *Chinampa* proceeded to the jetty to make fast and disembark troops and stores, but she met heavy enemy fire which fatally wounded Henderson, and wounded Lieutenant Anderson<sup>6</sup> and a rating. Both ships thereupon withdrew without landing their troops, and proceeded to Darwin, where they arrived on 2nd August. The surviving Dutch defenders at Saumlaki made their way to Larat Island, where their numbers were swelled by other refugees, and eventually a total of 36, including two Australian soldiers, and Dutch native troops, police, and civilians, reached Bathurst Island in a ketch on 14th August.

In September *Warrnambool* made her third visit to the islands, again to the Aru group to bring out survivors of "Plover" Force. At 3 a.m. on the 15th she sailed from Darwin, and at 6 p.m. next day closed up at action stations, ran close in to shore at Ngaibor, and took off one officer and 40 N.E.I. troops, and one native civilian official with his wife and seven children. She proceeded to sea again at 7 p.m., and reached Darwin without incident at 2 p.m. on the 18th.

## II

Meanwhile, farther west, other operations involving small ships from Darwin continued at Timor, and six days after her arrival at Darwin from the Aru Islands, *Warrnambool* was caught up in the Timor activities when she went there with *Kalgoorlie* in the attempt to succour *Voyager*.

As previously stated, by the beginning of September *Kuru* had made six successful trips to Timor, and *Vigilant* had made three. These were in service to the main "Sparrow" Force on the island. But on her 6th trip *Kuru*, before calling on "Sparrow" Force at Betano, landed four members of "Z" Special Unit<sup>7</sup> at Beco, some 50 miles east of Betano. The need to sustain this force led the Naval Board to ask N.O.I.C. Darwin if he could provide a powered lugger or similar craft with volunteer crew "for three possibly four visits eastern Timor". Pope replied that in view of anticipated trips to Timor by corvettes, and future special trips by *Kuru* and *Vigilant*, he considered it impossible to place this extensive service on a voluntary basis or to differentiate between it and that indicated in the Naval Board's request, "which would be bad precedent for the former". He proposed to treat the indicated visits to eastern Timor as normal service,

<sup>5</sup> CWO F. J. Henderson, RANR. Comd HMAS's *Moruya* 1941-42, *Chinampa* 1942. Of Melbourne; b. Maitland, SA, 9 Nov 1907. Killed in action 31 Jul 1942.

<sup>6</sup> Lt W. F. Anderson, RANVR. HMAS *Chinampa*. Bank officer; of Perth, WA; b. Perth, 6 Jul 1900.

<sup>7</sup> Those landed were Captain D. K. Broadhurst and three companions. "Z" Special was a small unit of the Australian Army of a highly secret nature, responsible for special operations and special intelligence tasks.

utilising the most suitable vessel when requirements were known. The Naval Board agreed, and subsequent trips to support "Z" Special were made by *Kuru* (8th October), *Kalgoorlie* (16th November), and *Vigilant* (8th December) to Aliambata, some 50 miles east of Beco.

At the beginning of October Pope was confronted with a large Timor problem, entailing the withdrawal of the 2/2nd Independent Company (approximately 363 all ranks); the transport of 50 Dutch troops to Timor; and the withdrawal therefrom of about 190 Dutch troops. He estimated a total of five corvette loads of troops, and had two ships immediately available, *Warrnambool* and *Kalgoorlie*; and a third, *Castlemaine*, due in a few days. A fourth, *Armidale*,<sup>8</sup> would possibly arrive in about a month. But as he remarked to the G.O.C. Northern Territory Force: "From past experience it is almost impossible to know a month ahead what new urgent duty will arise or whether one or more of the corvettes allotted to me may not be removed from this area for more urgent duties at Moresby or elsewhere." *Castlemaine* arrived at Darwin from her Coral Sea escorting duties on 5th October. She made acquaintance with Timor one month later. On 5th November she loaded military mail and stores, embarked one Dutch military officer and four war correspondents, and on the 6th sailed for Betano, where she arrived on the evening of the 7th. She was back in Darwin with some troops and refugees at 10.30 a.m. on the 9th.

On 7th November *Armidale* (Lieut-Commander Richards<sup>9</sup>), who had also been employed on Coral Sea escort work, arrived in Darwin. On the 10th, Lieut-Colonel Spence,<sup>1</sup> commanding "Sparrow" Force, signalled Northern Territory Force headquarters that the 2/2nd Independent Company urgently needed relief. He himself was under orders to transfer to Northern Territory Force, and on 11th November he was succeeded in command of "Sparrow" Force by Major Callinan,<sup>2</sup> who had previously commanded the 2/2nd Independent Company. On 18th November *Kuru*, now under the command of Lieutenant Grant,<sup>3</sup> made her penultimate trip to Timor, to land stores at Betano, and to explore landing places at the Kelan River and Quicras—both some few miles to the eastward of Betano—as alternative landing places thereto if the use of Betano was denied by the enemy. *Kuru*'s operation order from Commodore Pope opened with the words: "An Allied force known as 'Lancer' Force"—this name having succeeded "Sparrow" as the force designation on 18th November. *Kuru* carried out her mission successfully, and reached Darwin on 22nd November, bringing with her from Betano Spence and eleven other members of the A.I.F., three war correspondents, and three Portuguese civilians.

<sup>8</sup> HMAS *Armidale*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts. Sunk off Timor, 1 Dec 1942.

<sup>9</sup> Cdr D. H. Richards, RD; RANR. HMAS *Kanimbla* 1939-42; comd HMAS *Armidale* 1942. Ship's officer; of Sydney; b. Williamstown, Vic, 1 Apr 1902. Died 11 Mar 1967.

<sup>1</sup> Lt-Col A. Spence, DSO. OC 2/2 Indep Coy 1941-42; comd Sparrow Force 1942, 2/9 Cav Cdo Regt 1944-45. Journalist; of Longreach, Qld; b. Bundaberg, Qld, 5 Feb 1906.

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Col B. J. Callinan, DSO, MC. 2/2 Indep Coy; comd Sparrow Force 1942-43, 26 Bn 1945. Civil engineer; of Moonee Ponds, Vic; b. Moonee Ponds, 2 Feb 1913.

<sup>3</sup> Lt J. A. Grant; RANR. Comd HMAS's *Patricia Cam* 1942, *Kuru* 1942-43; HMAS *Manoora* 1943-44; comd HMAS *Katoomba* 1944-45. Of Forbes, NSW; b. Southsea, England, 6 Nov 1903.

On 24th November Allied Land Forces Headquarters approved the relief of the 2/2nd Independent Company, and the withdrawal from the island at the same time of some 150 Portuguese who wished to go to Australia. Arrangements were made, and Pope, in Darwin, put in train the withdrawal operation, using *Kuru*, *Castlemaine*, and *Armidale*. The proposal was for the three ships each to make two trips—to run into Betano on the night 30th November-1st December, land the 50 fresh Dutch troops and lift the 190 to be withdrawn, together with the 150 Portuguese, and return on the night 4th-5th December for the 2/2nd Independent Company.

*Kuru* sailed from Darwin at 10.30 p.m. on 28th November for Betano, where she was to anticipate the arrival of the corvettes by two hours and in the interval to land stores and embark the Portuguese refugees, ready to transfer them to *Castlemaine* when the corvettes arrived. *Castlemaine* would then leave for Darwin while *Kuru*—ferrying because of her lighter draft—would land the 50 Dutch troops from *Armidale*, and then load that ship with sick and wounded commandos and Dutch troops, embark her own passengers, and the two ships would leave in company for Australia. *Kuru* had overcast and rain most of the run across, was delayed by making her landfall some distance east of Betano, and finally reached there three hours late at 11.45 p.m. on 30th November.

*Castlemaine* (Senior Officer), and *Armidale*—the last named with two Dutch Army officers, 61 native troops, and three A.I.F. on board—left Darwin at 1.42 a.m. on 29th November. At 9.15 a.m. on the 30th, when they were about 120 miles from their destination, the two ships were attacked by a single aircraft which, after dropping a number of bombs without success, made off towards Timor an hour later. Lieut-Commander Sullivan, feeling that this discovery jeopardised the operation, steered an evasive course, and signalled Darwin for further orders. The reply was that fighter protection was being sent, and the operation must proceed and the risk be accepted.<sup>4</sup> The ships were subjected to two more air attacks, each by formations of five bombers according to *Armidale* (who reported that in the second attack the bombers were driven off by the promised fighters) and by “nine planes in V formation dropping not less than 45 bombs and machine-gunning from a low level” in the closing stages of the attack, according to *Castlemaine*. The ships suffered no damage or casualties, and reached Betano at 3.30 a.m. on 1st December. There was no sign of *Kuru*.

Having arrived late at Betano, Grant was in somewhat of a quandary. He did not know that the corvettes had been delayed by air attacks, and wondered if they had reached Betano ahead of him and sailed when they did not find him there. He embarked 77 Portuguese refugees and one

<sup>4</sup> *Castlemaine* to NOIC Darwin (R) *Armidale*: “10 degrees 30 min. south, 127 degrees 48 min. east, course 180 degrees speed 12 knots. Consider prospects operation doubtful. Request orders. 0020Z/30.”

NOIC Darwin to *Castlemaine*: “Steer evasive course to north-east for one hour. Beaupighters about 0230Z. Your 0020Z acknowledged. Risk must be accepted. 0102Z/30.”

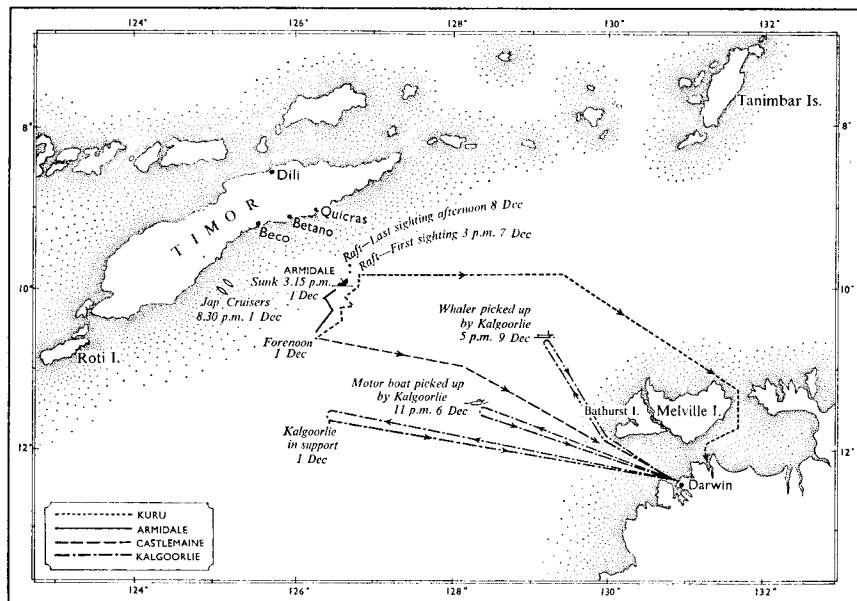
A.I.F. stretcher case, and, there still being no sign of the corvettes, sailed about 2 a.m. on 1st December, after sending a signal to Pope through "Lancer" Force: "Have 70 women and children on board. No contact. Returning Darwin." Pope's reply directed him to repeat the operation on the night 1st-2nd December, and at 5 a.m. on 1st December Pope sailed *Kalgoorlie* to a position about 250 miles W by N of Darwin to give general support. Actually it was concern lest *Kuru* might have awaited him at Betano that caused Sullivan to enter the bay at 3.30 a.m., though it was then far too late to proceed with the operation. Once he was sure that *Kuru* was not there he sailed, and the two corvettes made as much southing as possible before daylight. *Kuru* was sighted some 70 miles south of Betano and closed soon after dawn, and her passengers transferred to *Castlemaine*, at which time Sullivan was told by Grant that *Kuru* was to return to Betano "and do the job tonight". The transfer was barely completed when enemy bombers appeared and *Kuru* ran for the cover of a rain squall.

Sullivan swiftly assessed the situation: *Kuru* was going back to Betano; *Armidale* had on board troops to land there; somebody had to search for two airmen from a missing Beaufighter (N.O.I.C. Darwin had given position and instructions); could *Armidale* and *Castlemaine* exchange passengers and roles, and *Castlemaine* accompany *Kuru* back to Betano? The presence of enemy aircraft clearly made any thought of the two corvettes exchanging passengers out of the question. Sullivan, as Senior Officer, was thus forced to the distasteful recommendation to Pope that *Kuru* and *Armidale* return to Betano to complete the troop operation, while *Castlemaine* searched for the Beaufighter pilots some 150 miles south-east of Betano, on her way back to Darwin. Pope approved, and directed Sullivan to instruct *Kuru* and *Armidale* accordingly, and the ships parted company.

Back in Darwin, Pope, for some hours, could follow events only through the medium of signals, helping as much as he could by arranging the provision of fighter protection and giving meteorological advice.<sup>5</sup> News of air attacks on *Kuru* and *Armidale* was soon forthcoming. *Kuru* reported being bombed at 12.28 p.m. on the 1st, and within half an hour *Armidale* also reported being attacked, at 12.54 p.m. She was then in position 10 degrees 35 minutes South, 126 degrees 16 minutes East, some 90 miles south of Betano. She and *Kuru* were not in company, nor within sight of each other. *Kuru*'s second "attack signal" was at the same time as *Armidale*'s, 12.54, and her third at 1.9 p.m. At 1.30 *Armidale* reported, from a position a few miles nearer Betano than at her immediately previous signal, that she was being bombed by nine aircraft—"no fighters arrived"; and 28 minutes later she gave the bare facts of being attacked by "nine

<sup>5</sup> Just after noon on the 1st, for example, he signalled to Sullivan to "steer 155 degrees until dark to take advantage of local storms to southward". Sullivan subsequently reported: "After parting company with *Armidale* and proceeding in search of airmen the cover of several rain-storms was gained until receipt of NOIC Darwin's instruction to steer 155 degrees which was obeyed."

bombers, four fighters. Absolutely no fighter support." *Kuru's* next signal was at 2.45 p.m., and that was followed by repeated reports from her of attacks by formations of up to ten bombers, at 3.51 p.m.,<sup>6</sup> 6.26 p.m., and 6.43 p.m. Grant estimated that during the 6 hours 50 minutes *Kuru* was subjected to these attacks, she was the object of attention of 44 bomber aircraft in 23 individual attacks, and that she was the target for approximately 200 bombs. Near misses averaged 5 feet to 100 feet from the ship.



Loss of H.M.A.S. *Armidale*

In the 2.45 p.m. attack she suffered some engine damage from shrapnel, and Grant signalled to Darwin that he was returning, unable to complete the operation. Pope replied that the operation must be carried through.<sup>7</sup> At about 8 p.m., however, he received news of an enemy threat additional to the air attacks, which caused him to order abandonment of the operation. At 8.5 p.m. Allied aircraft reported two Japanese cruisers about 60 miles south-west of Betano and about the same distance from *Armidale's* last reported (12.54 p.m.) position, steaming at 25 knots and steering south-easterly towards that position. At 8.30 p.m. they were attacked by

<sup>6</sup> In this attack *Kuru* was straddled: "Two on my bows, about ten feet off, one aft, which blew up our assault boat, which was being towed by ten feet of line. This straddle shook up the ship's clock, an eight-bell striking clock, and rang the bell. One of the ratings, Signalman Jamieson, looked up at the planes and said: 'Tojo, you've got a bloody cigar!'". *Kuru*, Captain's "Report of Proceedings".

<sup>7</sup> NOIC Darwin to *Armidale*, *Kuru*, 0601Z (Greenwich time, 4.31 p.m. local time) 1st December. "You are to proceed to Betano to carry out this important operation. Recognition as for last night. Air attack is to be accepted as ordinary routine secondary warfare. *Armidale* be prepared to begin operation without assistance from *Kuru*."

Hudson aircraft of the R.A.A.F. But by this time *Armidale* presented no target for this new enemy. She had for nearly five hours been lying on the bed of the Timor Sea in position 10 degrees South, 126 degrees 30 minutes East, about 70 miles S.S.E. of Betano. At 3.15 p.m. on 1st December, in an attack by nine bombers, three fighters, and one float plane, *Armidale* was struck by two torpedoes and possibly one bomb. She turned over and sank in three or four minutes. During the action one bomber and one fighter were seen to crash into the sea some distance from the ship, victims to the ship's anti-aircraft fire. The bomber fell to Ordinary Seaman Sheean<sup>8</sup> at the after oerlikon, who remained at the gun when the ship sank.<sup>9</sup>

Of all of this, Pope, in Darwin, was unaware at the time. During the afternoon he signalled to all four ships—*Kalgoorlie*, *Castlemaine*, *Armidale* and *Kuru*—directing courses to be steered and positions reached to enable fighter protection to be arranged and *Kalgoorlie*'s cover to be effective. On receiving the enemy cruiser sighting he cancelled the operation and directed *Armidale* and *Kuru* to "return Darwin forthwith steer initial course east for 100 miles thence via Cape Don" (Dundas Strait, the western extremity of the Cobourg Peninsula), and told *Castlemaine* and *Kalgoorlie* to return to Darwin "with all despatch. Maintain W/T silence."

*Castlemaine* was the first home at 9.39 a.m. on 2nd December, followed about three hours later by *Kalgoorlie*. Pope still assumed that *Armidale* was returning to Darwin in accordance with his previous instructions, and at 7 p.m. on the 2nd he told her by signal she could return by Cape Fourcroy (the western cape of Bathurst Island) if desired, and to report her position at 2.30 a.m. on the 3rd. About the same time he signalled to Navy Office:

What is the earliest date at which I can expect Fairmiles?<sup>1</sup> Requirements Timor operations becoming increasingly difficult with slow vessels available. Last one was unsuccessful except for partial evacuation of refugees. Ships subject continuous air attack and were withdrawn on threat of surface attack. Expect all ships will have returned intact by tomorrow Thursday except that *Kuru* is very slightly damaged but making good speed.

*Kuru* reached Darwin at 5.26 p.m. on 3rd December. Some hours earlier doubts as to *Armidale*'s safety had arisen in Darwin, and at 11.36 a.m.

<sup>8</sup> OD E. Sheean, H1617. HMAS *Armidale*. Of Hobart; b. Barrington, Tas, 28 Dec 1923. Killed in action 1 Dec 1942.

<sup>9</sup> There were numerous references to Ordinary Seaman Sheean in reports by survivors. Richards, *Armidale*'s commanding officer, singled him out for special mention: "Ordinary Seaman Edward Sheean, although wounded, remained at his post at the after oerlikon, and was responsible for bringing down one enemy bomber. He continued firing until he was killed at his gun." "Report of Proceedings of HMAS *Armidale*."

Ordinary Seaman R. M. Caro, PM4100, in an account of the action, wrote: "During the attack a plane had been brought down and for this the credit went to Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean. Teddy died, but none of us who survived, I am sure, will ever forget his gallant deed which won him a Mention in Despatches. He was a loader number on the after oerlikon gun. When the order 'Abandon ship' was given, he made for the side, only to be hit twice by the bullets of an attacking Zero. None of us will ever know what made him do it, but he went back to his gun, strapped himself in, and brought down a Jap plane, still firing as he disappeared beneath the waves."

<sup>1</sup> The first Fairmile motor launch built in Australia (ML813) was laid down at the yard of Lars Halvorsen and Sons, Sydney, on 25th March 1942 and launched on 7th October 1942. She commissioned on 16th November 1942. ML814 was the second Fairmile to arrive in Darwin, 25th May 1943 (Lieutenant R. R. Lewis). The first Fairmile to arrive in Darwin was ML815, 8th April 1943 (Lieutenant C. A. J. Inman).



on the 3rd, Pope expressed these to the Naval Board, referring to the air attacks she had reported, and concluding: "Possibility she was sunk by aircraft or damaged and subsequently located by enemy cruisers. Air search is proceeding." The air searches produced results at 10.15 a.m. on 5th December, when a boat with survivors was sighted in 11 degrees 19 minutes South, 128 degrees 20 minutes East—about 115 miles west of Bathurst Island.

When *Armidale* was struck by torpedoes at 3.15 p.m. on 1st December she had on board a total of 149, comprising ship's company of 83, three A.I.F., two Dutch Army officers, and 61 Indonesian troops. About two-thirds of the Indonesian troops were in the forward mess deck and were killed by the blast of the first torpedo. The ship swiftly took a heavy list to port and when, within a minute or so, this reached 50 degrees, "Abandon Ship" was ordered, and the survivors left the ship in the motor-boat and on a Carley float and wreckage. They were machine-gunned from the aircraft, and a number killed and wounded (two of the wounded subsequently died). Of the ship's company there were killed in the initial explosion, by subsequent machine-gunning in the water, or died shortly afterwards, one officer, Engineer Lieutenant Jenkyn,<sup>2</sup> R.A.N.R., 9 ratings and 37 N.E.I. troops.

The wounded were put in the motor-boat, which collected flotsam for rafts; and next morning a raft was built, using two french floats from the ship's minesweeping gear as a foundation. It was hoped that Allied reconnaissance aircraft would find them, but when, by midday, none had been sighted, the commanding officer—Lieut-Commander Richards—decided to make for Darwin in the motor-boat for help. This was a painful decision (reached after consultation with the ship's company) forced upon him by the fact that the First Lieutenant, Lieutenant Whitting,<sup>3</sup> the only other officer capable of navigating, was paralysed from the hips down, and incapable of taking the boat away. Those in the motor-boat totalled 22—Richards, Whitting, 16 ratings, and four N.E.I. soldiers. The boat set off in the afternoon of Wednesday, 2nd December. She had fuel for about 100 miles, but at the outset the motor would not function, and for 28 hours she was rowed. The motor was then started, and she motored for 20 hours. When she was sighted by a reconnaissance aircraft from Darwin on Saturday, 5th December, at 10.15 a.m., she was about 150 miles W.N.W. of Darwin (and about 150 miles E.S.E. of where *Armidale* was sunk) and making slow progress under sail. This sighting gave Pope, in Darwin, the first certain indication of the loss of *Armidale*. He at once dispatched *Kalgoorlie* to the position, and she sailed from Darwin at 11.40 a.m.

By this time another boat with *Armidale* survivors was on its way. When

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<sup>2</sup> Engr Lt H. F. M. Jenkyn, RANR; HMAS *Armidale*. Of Cammeray, NSW; b. Sydney, 14 Aug 1909. Killed in action 1 Dec 1942.

<sup>3</sup> Lt W. G. Whitting, DSC; RANR. Comd HMAS *Vendetta* 1941-42; HMAS *Armidale* 1942; comd HMAS *Colac* 1943-44. Ship's officer; of Newcastle, NSW; b. Cardiff, Wales, 14 Jul 1915.

the motor-boat set out the previous Wednesday, 80 survivors were left on the rafts and wreckage—55 of the ship's company, three A.I.F., and 22 N.E.I. troops. *Armidale's* gunnery officer, Lieutenant Palmer,<sup>4</sup> was in charge. Among the wreckage was *Armidale's* whaler, which was badly holed, submerged, and suspended about four feet below the surface by two 44-gallon drums to which she was lashed. She gave slight additional support to about 25 men wearing lifebelts. On Thursday the survivors managed to haul one end of the waterlogged craft on to the rafts, to bale out, and to repair her sufficiently to keep her afloat with continuous baling. Since no Allied aircraft had been sighted by 11.15 a.m. on Saturday, 5th December (by which time the survivors were reduced by two with the deaths of Leading Cook Williams<sup>5</sup> and one N.E.I. soldier), Lieutenant Palmer decided to try to reach the Allied reconnaissance area in the whaler. He took in her 25 of *Armidale's* ratings and the three A.I.F. soldiers, and steered south-east. There remained on the raft 28 of the ship's company, and on the Carley float 21 Dutch troops, including the two officers. The whole party was in charge of Sub-Lieutenant Buckland.<sup>6</sup>

*Kalgoorlie* left Darwin at 11.40 a.m. on 5th December. She reached the vicinity of the sighting of *Armidale's* motor-boat at 2.30 next morning, and proceeded to search the area. That afternoon a Japanese reconnaissance aircraft sighted her, and two bombers attacked for half an hour from 4.40 p.m. and aimed a total of 16 bombs at the ship, the nearest landing some 50 feet distant. *Kalgoorlie* fought back. At 10 o'clock that night, Sunday, 6th December, *Kalgoorlie* sighted a red Very light, and an hour later she picked up the 20 survivors from the motor-boat (two of its original company had died—Ordinary Seaman Smith<sup>7</sup> and one N.E.I. soldier) and hoisted the boat inboard. They were in poor shape. Many were wounded (two died in *Kalgoorlie*) and Richards, *Armidale's* commanding officer, was speechless with exhaustion, and unable to impart much information. This particular Timor operation was one of difficult decisions, and Litchfield, *Kalgoorlie's* commanding officer, was now faced with the alternative of seeking the rafts, or returning to Darwin with the survivors he had on board. The balance lay between his placing *Kalgoorlie* in an area where she might well suffer *Armidale's* fate, and the possibility that the rafts would be found by a flying boat and their survivors rescued before *Kalgoorlie* could arrive. He decided to return to Darwin, and reached there at 1.30 p.m. on the 7th.

An hour or two after *Kalgoorlie* reached Darwin, an aircraft sighted the rafts, in position about 280 miles N.W. by W. of Darwin—about 33 miles north-east of where *Armidale* had sunk. There appeared to be 25

<sup>4</sup> Lt L. G. Palmer, VRD; RANR. HMAS's *Kanimbla*, *Armidale*, *Shepparton* and *Kalgoorlie*. Plumber; of Williamstown, Vic; b. Williamstown, 19 Oct 1915.

<sup>5</sup> Ldg Cook W. B. Williams, 22022. HMAS's *Australia* and *Armidale*. Hall porter; of Hobart; b. Hobart, 2 Feb 1920. Lost in sinking of *Armidale*, 2 Dec 1942.

<sup>6</sup> Sub-Lt J. R. Buckland, RANVR; HMAS *Armidale*. Student; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 6 Apr 1920. Killed in action 8 Dec 1942.

<sup>7</sup> OD F. F. Smith, S5399; HMAS *Armidale*. Of Brighton-le-Sands, NSW; b. Brighton-le-Sands, 27 Jul 1918. Lost in sinking of *Armidale*, 1 Dec 1942.

to 35 men in three groups, near to each other. The last sighting by this aircraft was at 3.56 p.m. Within minutes of the aircraft's report being received, Pope ordered *Vigilant* to the position, but soon afterwards cancelled the order on learning that a Catalina aircraft had been sent from Cairns, and directed *Vigilant* to lie off the north-west corner of Melville Island in anticipation of the aircraft sighting the raft. This the Catalina did in the afternoon of the 8th, in a position seven miles N.N.E. of the earlier sighting. By this time the occupants of the raft had dwindled to "20 at the most". The flying boat was unable to alight because of the state of the sea, and Pope ordered *Vigilant* to the position. In addition to sighting the rafts the Catalina, on its return flight to Darwin, sighted the whaler—then about 150 miles north-west of Darwin and approximately the same distance south of the rafts. Pope again sent *Kalgoorlie*, who left Darwin in the morning of the 9th and sighted the whaler at 4.57 p.m.<sup>8</sup> Within an hour she embarked the 29 survivors and hoisted the whaler inboard, and delivered the rescued men at Darwin at 11.25 a.m. on the 10th. Nothing more was seen of the rafts and their tragic, dwindling company, in spite of extensive and exhaustive air searches carried out daily until 13th December, and surface runs through the area, including one by the Dutch destroyer *Tjerk Hiddes*.

It will be recalled that when *Castlemaine* returned to Darwin on 2nd December and it became clear that the operation had gone astray, though the loss of *Armidale* was not yet known, Pope asked the Naval Board when he could expect Fairmiles to replace the slow vessels he was forced to employ for Timor operations. Two days later he told both the Naval Board and Comsouwespacfor (Vice-Admiral A. S. Carpender, U.S.N., who succeeded Vice-Admiral Leary on 11th September) that it was urgently required to withdraw from Timor 51 sick and wounded, 295 2/2nd Independent Company, 176 Dutch and 326 Portuguese. "Urgently request destroyer be sent Darwin to run about three trips." Carpender responded at once by directing Commander Task Force 51 (Rear-Admiral C. A. Lockwood, U.S.N.), in Fremantle, to send a destroyer forthwith to Darwin. *Tjerk Hiddes* reached the northern port on 9th December and sailed next morning for Betano. She was back in Darwin in the afternoon of the 11th with 49 sick and wounded, 64 2/2nd Independent Company, 192 Dutch and 87 Portuguese. Between 10th and 19th December she transported in three trips approximately 950 persons from Timor to Darwin "with great efficiency".<sup>9</sup> She left Darwin to return to Fremantle on the 20th.

By then "Finis" had been written to the unsuccessful attempt by the corvettes to carry out the operation, and hope for the recovery of any more survivors from *Armidale* had died. *Vigilant*, ordered to the last known position of the rafts on 8th December, fell a victim to serious engine

<sup>8</sup> From the time of its sighting by the Catalina, the whaler was kept under observation by "one long procession of aircraft, we were dropped big tins of water by parachute, prunes, cigarettes, medical supplies, in fact everything we wanted". Account by survivor Ordinary Seaman Caro.

<sup>9</sup> Signal (6.25 p.m. 19th December) from NOIC Darwin to Comsouwespacfor, Naval Board, CTF51.

defects and had to return to port. Her place was taken by *Kalgoorlie*, who left Darwin on the 11th and searched unsuccessfully until the 13th (she sighted both *Tjerk Hiddes* and *Vigilant* during the period) and she was recalled to Darwin by Pope when the air and surface search was "reluctantly abandoned". In this operation there was throughout wholehearted and valuable cooperation by the R.A.A.F. Although the Beaufighters from Darwin were unable to give adequate close air cover to the ships, they gave indirect protection by destroying five Japanese aircraft and damaging approximately 20 others on Koepang aerodrome; and the extent of the air searches may be appreciated by the fact that the R.A.A.F. aircraft made 43 sorties and flew more than 40,000 miles over a total period of 300 flying hours.

As remarked, this operation was notable for the painful and difficult decisions which had to be made by all those in the various commands. In his over-all responsibility at Darwin, Commodore Pope's position was comparable with that of Admiral Cunningham's in Alexandria in May 1941, when he had to order units of the Mediterranean Fleet to suffer heavy air attacks and heavy losses in the Battle of Crete. Sullivan so felt the responsibility of his own decision in recommending the return of *Castlemaine* to Darwin while *Armidale* and *Kuru* continued the Timor operation (particularly after he, in his signal to Pope of 30th November, had expressed his doubts of the operation's prospects) that he sought an inquiry, an action which Pope, at first, thought implied criticism of his own conduct of affairs.<sup>1</sup> Similar difficult and distasteful decisions had to be reached by Richards with regard to *Armidale*'s motor-boat, and Litchfield and *Kalgoorlie* when he picked up the first of *Armidale*'s survivors.

The subsequent inquiry paid particular attention to all aspects of the operation, and in every regard the finding of the Naval Board was favourable, and the decisions and actions of the various commanding officers fully endorsed. Of the over-all conduct of the operation by N.O.I.C. Darwin "in the face of possible risk from air and surface attack", the Board remarked:

We have to remember that similar operations had been taking place during the last two or three months. We have to remember that many naval risks and serious losses have been incurred in supporting the garrisons of Tobruk and Malta and in passing convoys to Russia under insistent air and submarine attack. This operation, though on a much smaller scale, had as its object the reinforcement of "Lancer" Force which was heavily outnumbered on the island, and the evacuation of refugees whose position was precarious. . . . The Naval Board consider that the carrying out of the operation with the forces available was a justifiable war risk.

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<sup>1</sup> "In view of the opinion expressed in my 0020/30 that prospects of the operation were doubtful and inter alia the subsequent results confirming that view I submit that the operation as a whole should be the subject matter of an inquiry." Sullivan, final paragraph of "Report on Operation", 7th December 1942. "With reference to the final paragraph of C.O. *Castlemaine*'s report I had at first thought this to be a direct criticism of my conduct of the operations and, as from a Junior Officer under my operational command, subversive of discipline. I am now satisfied that the paragraph which might have been better expressed was in no sense intended in that light." Pope, Report "Operation Hamburger. Loss of HMAS *Armidale*." Darwin, 14th December 1942.

During December 1942, an "Appreciation for the capture of the Island of Timor" was produced.<sup>2</sup> The preliminary plan, "Madrigal" (a copy of which was sent to the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, Captain Nichols, on 17th December), envisaged an operation in two phases, the capture of Koepang and its development as an advanced base, and operations to secure the remainder of the island, the operation to be carried out between April and October 1943. An estimate of the naval forces required ("if the main Japanese forces are not occupied elsewhere") was one battleship, three aircraft carriers, eight heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and 22 destroyers, with auxiliaries; and transport ships and landing craft were estimated at six Landing Ships Infantry, six troopships, and six cargo ships. Commenting on the Appreciation, the Director of Plans at Navy Office, Commander Dowling,<sup>3</sup> told D.C.N.S. that he was not happy concerning the proposed strength of the covering naval force, which he considered unbalanced. "It was put up, I feel, without a thorough investigation; in fact the naval side has not been investigated. . . . I cannot imagine, at present, from where we are to get the troop and store carrying craft which are necessary if this operation is to be carried out." On 25th January 1943 General MacArthur ruled "Madrigal" out of place in the period proposed for it, by defining any plans for the taking of Timor as a "long-distance project", which was, in the event, never embarked upon.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile the role of the guerilla forces in Timor was discussed in relation to the proposed "Madrigal" operation, and the view was advanced by the planners that their retention on the island could only be justified if their presence would materially assist the operation. It was considered that they could not so assist except by the provision of Intelligence and information, and it was therefore recommended "that our future activities should be confined to establishing and maintaining information channels only. This would entail (a) withdrawing the majority of the guerillas from the island, (b) forbidding such parties and individuals as are left behind from indulging in any aggressive acts and confining their activities to observation and reporting."<sup>5</sup>

On 2nd January 1943, N.O.I.C. Darwin told the Naval Board and Comsouwespac that the total withdrawal of Lancer Force might be necessary within the near future, and requested the allocation of a destroyer

<sup>2</sup> The appreciation was prepared by Captain J. Carson, USN; Lt-Col M. W. Hope, RA; Lt-Col T. K. Walker, RM; and Wing Commander W. N. Gibson, RAAF.

<sup>3</sup> Vice-Admiral Sir Roy Dowling, KBE, CB, DSO; RAN, Comd HMS *Naiad* 1939-42; Dir of Plans, Navy Office 1942-43; DCNS 1943-44; Capt HMAS *Hobart* 1944-46; Flag Offr Comdg Aust Fleet 1953-54; First Naval Member and CNS 1955-59; Chairman Aust Chiefs of Staff Cttee 1959-61. B. Condong, Tweed River, NSW, 28 May 1901.

<sup>4</sup> On 25th January 1943 the following observations of General MacArthur were conveyed to the Advisory War Council. "General MacArthur said that he viewed the increase in Japanese strength in Timor as purely defensive to secure themselves against any attack from Australia and to suppress continuation of the successful commando tactics which had been pursued by the Australian and Dutch forces. The C-in-C added that he definitely did not possess the resources to retake Timor. Furthermore the Japanese have control of the seas in this region and MacArthur could not land by air from Australia and keep supplied by air the force that would be necessary for the recapture of this island. Any plans for the taking of Timor were a long-distance project." AWC Minute No. 1121, Strategic Importance of Timor, 25 Jan 1943.

<sup>5</sup> "Annexure X" to copy of "Appreciation for the capture of Timor" forwarded to D.C.G.S. by Lt-Col Hope "in accordance with your Minute of 2nd October 1942".

for the task. *Arunta* was allocated. She reached Darwin from Cairns on 7th January, embarked eight Army assault craft, and sailed from Darwin at 7 a.m. on the 9th. She crossed the Timor Sea in weather "overcast with heavy rain and wind squalls which provided excellent cover from enemy reconnaissance planes" and at 1.30 a.m. on the 10th anchored in 27 fathoms about three-quarters of a mile from the beach at Quicras. Beach conditions were bad, with a heavy surf running and capsizing and swamping several of the assault boats, and it was found impossible to load them with their correct complement of 15 men and crew of five. At 4 a.m. Morrow, *Arunta's* captain, told the beach that no more equipment or stores would be taken "and that the men must swim through the surf and board the assault craft outside it, otherwise there would be no chance of getting them off before daylight". At 5 a.m. there were still about 100 men on shore, but Morrow decided to wait and get them off if possible before daylight, hoping to run into bad cyclonic weather when about 30 miles clear of the coast. The last boats returned to the ship at 6.20 a.m., and ten minutes later Morrow

proceeded at my best speed. At 0710 it was daylight and much too clear, but I could see squalls about twenty miles to port of my course and steered towards them and from 0815 onwards the visibility was never more than two miles until I was approaching Darwin.

*Arunta* secured alongside at Darwin at 7 p.m. on 10th January, bringing with her 24 officers and 258 other ranks of "Lancer" Force, eleven women and children, and twenty Portuguese who had been working with the army. Morrow, in his report, stated that Mr Ley,<sup>6</sup> Commissioned Gunner (T), was in charge of the boats inshore, "and I consider that it was only due to his fine seamanship and drive that all the troops were brought off. He was most ably assisted by Leading Seaman Power<sup>7</sup> and Able Seaman Asser,<sup>8</sup> who were outstanding in handling their boats and generally taking charge."

### III

As stated earlier, the Japanese High Command decided on 31st August 1942 to abandon the attempt to capture Milne Bay for use as a staging point for a seaborne attack on Port Moresby, and to concentrate on the recapture of Guadalcanal. Next day Admiral Turner—of course unaware of the enemy's decision—wrote to Admiral Ghormley expressing his faith in the value of Guadalcanal, "an unsinkable aircraft carrier which I believe may finally be multiplied into an invincible fleet adequate for a decisive move". He remarked that this would require patience, and adequate forces, and continued:

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<sup>6</sup> Lt F. H. R. Ley; RAN. HMAS's *Stuart*, *Arunta*. Of Yarrowitch, NSW; b. Croyde, England, 25 Mar 1900. Died 28 Aug 1959.

<sup>7</sup> PO J. J. Power, DSM, 18457. HMAS *Arunta*. B. Maryborough, Qld, 16 Jun 1909.

<sup>8</sup> CPO H. E. B. Asser, 21453. HMAS's *Napier*, *Stuart*, *Arunta*, *Nizam*. B. Semaphore, SA, 20 Jul 1920.

The enemy is now hampered by his adventures in the Aleutians and Eastern New Guinea. I believe that the immediate consolidation and extension of our [Guadalcanal-Tulagi] position is now possible and advisable, and is a golden military opportunity that ought not to be missed.<sup>9</sup>

Simultaneously General MacArthur was expressing to the War Department, Washington, concern at the situation and outlook in New Guinea. On 28th August he warned the War Department that the Japanese might strike at New Guinea under cover of the Solomons operations, and that he was "powerless to prevent this due to the absence of S.W.P.A. naval forces in the Soupac area", and he recommended that Soupac be given the additional mission of covering Milne Bay. Two days later MacArthur followed this with another warning to Washington "of acute danger rapidly developing in Pacific theatre as Japanese have slackened efforts in China and thinned garrisons in occupied zones to move centre of gravity towards S.W.P.A." In a reply on 31st August he was told that his concern was appreciated in Washington; that all S.W.P.A. naval units had been returned from other duty (this referred to Task Force 44 being detached that day from Soupac command); and that the situation would depend on cooperation and coordination among MacArthur and Nimitz and Ghormley. Authority was granted for him to deal directly with the two admirals "to effect mutual support in Soupac and S.W.P.A." At the conference in Ghormley's flagship at Noumea on 4th September, when an attempt was made to adjust the situation as between Soupac and S.W.P.A., Nimitz told MacArthur's representatives—Sutherland and Kenney—that he could not spare MacArthur any ships, additional air cover, or trained amphibious troops, which Sutherland said were needed for any attempt to occupy the north coast of New Guinea. Unless Soupac itself was reinforced "the enemy could recover Guadalcanal whenever he really tried".<sup>1</sup> In Noumea at the time, the American Under-Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, was impressed with the situation and returned promptly to Washington to seek reinforcements for Ghormley and Vandegrift. These were, from time to time, forthcoming.

Meanwhile MacArthur resumed his efforts to get naval support for New Guinea operations. In a personal message to Marshall on 6th September he urged

that attack to clear the north coast of New Guinea be undertaken as soon as possible. If defensive attitude only is maintained the situation will soon become serious. The enemy attack has developed and is now revealed as infiltration from the north in ever-increasing pressure. Adverse weather and other conditions make it impossible to prevent his landing with great freedom on the north shore. . . . Due to lack of maritime resources I am unable to increase ground forces in New Guinea as I cannot maintain them. I have temporary air superiority there. It is imperative that shipping and naval forces for escort duty be increased to ensure communication between Australian mainland and south coast of New Guinea. With these additional naval facilities I can dispatch large ground reinforcements to New Guinea with the

<sup>9</sup> Morison, Vol V, pp. 114-15.

<sup>1</sup> Morison, Vol V, p. 116.

objective of counter infiltration towards the north at the same time making creeping advances along the north coast with small vessels and marine amphibious forces. Such action will secure a situation which otherwise is doubtful. If New Guinea goes the results will be disastrous. This is urgent.

The Allies and Japanese faced similar problems in both Guadalcanal and New Guinea, but each side realised that in the solution of those facing it in the southern Solomons lay the answer to those confronting it in New Guinea, and that thus the determination of the Guadalcanal question was the more immediately urgent. That determination could be reached only through command of the sea, and to that objective each side now bent its full energies.

#### IV

The Guadalcanal prize was the Henderson Field, and it was the focal point of the bloody fighting which, both on the island itself and the seas around it, raged in American-Japanese clashes during the last four months of 1942. It was saved for the Americans by the success of the Marines in hand-to-hand fighting against fanatical Japanese attacks during the nights of 12th-13th and 13th-14th September, in the crucial ground actions of Bloody Ridge, on the southern edge of the airfield. On the 14th Admiral Turner sailed from Espiritu Santo escorting six transports of reinforcements—the 7th Marine Regiment. In distant support to the southward of Guadalcanal were the carriers *Wasp* and *Hornet*, with cruisers and destroyers and the battleship *North Carolina*. To the north and north-westward of the island were Japanese carriers and battleships and "Tokyo Express" groups, deterred from making an offensive sortie by the American carrier groups. It fell to an enemy submarine, or submarines, to take toll of these. In the early afternoon of the 15th *Wasp*, manoeuvring to fly off and land on aircraft, was struck by three torpedoes from *I 19*. Shortly afterwards a torpedo—probably from *I 15* which was in company with *Wasp*'s attacker—struck *North Carolina*, and another blew a gaping hole in the bow of destroyer *O'Brien*.<sup>2</sup> Carrier and destroyer were sunk. The battleship reached Pearl Harbour, and was repaired. The operation they had been supporting was concluded successfully on 18th September, when Turner disembarked "tanks, vehicles, weapons, bullets, food, fuel and assorted supplies along with nearly 4,000 men" at Lunga. But the loss of the three ships was one that could be ill-afforded. Since the initial landing on 7th August, American Pacific Fleet carrier strength had dwindled from four to one,<sup>3</sup> and the damage to *North Carolina* left only one new battleship, *Washington*, operating in the Pacific. In these important capital ship categories the Japanese in the area were superior.

Another American reinforcement move led to the Battle of Cape Esperance in which the Americans got some revenge for their earlier losses. On 9th October Turner left Noumea in *McCawley* with transport *Zeilin*

<sup>2</sup> *O'Brien*, US destroyer (1940), 1,570 tons, four 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. Sunk off Guadalcanal 15 Sept 1942.

<sup>3</sup> *Enterprise* damaged at the Battle of the Eastern Solomons on 24th August; *Saratoga* damaged by torpedo from *I 26* on 31st August; and now *Wasp*.



(10,000 tons) and destroyer escorts, carrying the 164th Infantry Regiment of the Americal Division for Guadalcanal. Distant covering forces were in three groups—carrier *Hornet* group some 180 miles south-west of the island, battleship *Washington* group about 50 miles east of Malaita, and a cruiser group commanded by Rear-Admiral Scott in *San Francisco* in the vicinity of Rennell Island. Scott's instructions from Ghormley were to protect the American convoy by offensive action and to "search for and destroy enemy ships and landing craft", and from this position he could move north in the afternoon to be in position to reach Savo Island before midnight should the Japanese ships come south. The enemy's "Tokyo Express" runs down "The Slot" from the Shortland Islands were successful in landing on occasions as many as 900 men a night near the north-western cape of Guadalcanal.<sup>4</sup> On the 11th, Japanese plans were to run a strong force down "The Slot" not only to land troops and artillery but to carry out a heavy bombardment of Henderson Field. The bombardment force comprised *Aoba*, *Kinugasa* and *Furutaka* of the 6th Cruiser Squadron—victors of the Savo Island battle of 9th August—under command of Rear-Admiral Goto, and the reinforcement group consisted of the seaplane carriers *Nisshin*<sup>5</sup> and *Chitose*, with six destroyers. Allied air reconnaissance reported the south-speeding Japanese (as two cruisers and six destroyers) in the afternoon of 11th October, and Scott—who on the 9th and 10th had made fruitless afternoon runs northward towards Guadalcanal—now hastened towards them to anticipate their arrival at Savo. He missed the appointment with the enemy's reinforcement group which was ahead of Goto's force, and which, when Scott reached the area, was already within the Sound off the Guadalcanal shore. Scott received both aircraft and radar reports of the reinforcement group as "one large and two small vessels", but decided to seek the larger game of the original air report, and to patrol across the entrance to the Sound outside Savo Island. Thus, just after 11 p.m., he was steaming at 30 knots in column in the order cruisers *San Francisco*, *Boise*, *Salt Lake City* and *Helena*, with destroyers extending the column ahead and astern, north-east across the entrance between Guadalcanal's Cape Esperance and Savo Island in just about the position in which destroyer *Blue* kept radar watch for Mikawa's force on the night of 8th-9th August. At 11.30 p.m. Scott reversed course, to steer south-west just as *Blue* had done, and, just as Mikawa had raced down the stretch of sea to the southern entrance to the Sound, so on this Sunday night just nine weeks after the battle of Savo Island, Goto's force, the three cruisers in column, *Aoba* in the van with destroyers *Hatsuyuki* and *Fubuki* on the port and starboard beam respectively, raced in at 26 knots for the entrance, intent on the bombardment of Henderson Field. But this night it was the Japanese who were taken by surprise, with Scott's

<sup>4</sup> The American situation was very similar to that of Admiral Cunningham at the Battle of Crete in May 1941, when the British forces raced up from the south each afternoon to sweep around the north of Crete to prevent German seaborne landings on that island.

<sup>5</sup> *Nisshin*, Japanese seaplane carrier (1939), 9,000 tons, six 5-in AA guns, 20 aircraft, 20 kts. Sunk off Buin, 22 Jul 1943.

force "crossing the T" and the enemy unaware of its presence. In the fierce night clash that resulted, fatal wounds were inflicted on cruiser *Furutaka* and destroyer *Fubuki*, and 40 hits on *Aoba* entailed her return to Japan for major repairs. Admiral Goto died of wounds. Scott's force lost the destroyer *Duncan*<sup>6</sup> sunk, and cruiser *Boise* severely damaged. The Japanese also lost destroyers *Natsugumo*<sup>7</sup> and *Murakumo* of the Reinforcement Group.

Cape Esperance was an American victory, but, as the American naval historian remarked:

The Japanese accomplished their main object. Not only did fresh troops get ashore at Tassafaronga while Goto and Scott were fighting, but seaplane carriers *Nisshin* and *Chitose* unloaded heavy artillery, which meant trouble for the Marines.<sup>8</sup>

The American reinforcements were safely landed also, on 13th October; and within a few hours these newcomers of the Americal Division received a baptism of fire in a furious bombardment of Henderson Field by battleships *Kongo* and *Haruna* which, commanded by Vice-Admiral Kurita, in the darkness of the first hours of 13th October poured nearly 1,000 14-inch shells on to the airfield, putting it out of action for some time. It was a performance on a scale that led to its being remembered by Guadalcanal veterans as "The Bombardment".

In October, with their depleted naval strength, the American position in the Solomons was parlous. On the 15th of the month Admiral Nimitz stated: "It now appears that we are unable to control the sea in the Guadalcanal area. Thus our supply of the positions will only be done at great expense to us. The situation is not hopeless, but it is certainly critical."

It was at this juncture that a change was made in the naval command with the appointment of Admiral Halsey to succeed Admiral Ghormley. For some months Halsey had been suffering from aggravated dermatitis, but now back to health he assumed his new office on 18th October. At the same time plans were made to reinforce the Soupac area. On the naval side a task group built round the new battleship *Indiana*<sup>9</sup> was ordered to transfer to the Pacific from the Atlantic, and the carrier *Enterprise*, her damage in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons repaired, was sent post haste to the Solomons. Meanwhile the Japanese were preparing for an all-out attack on Guadalcanal, the preliminaries of which were the various bombardments of the airfield, the landing of the reinforcements on 11th October and of another 4,500 on the 15th, and the capture of the Henderson Field. Not until this last mentioned was effected would they commit their main naval force. Unfortunately for the plan, Henderson Field was not captured by 22nd October according to schedule, and the delay enabled

<sup>6</sup> *Duncan*, US destroyer (1942), 1,630 tons, four 5-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts. Sunk off Savo I, 12 Oct 1942.

<sup>7</sup> *Natsugumo*, Japanese destroyer (1938), 1,500 tons, six 5-in guns, eight 24-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts. Sunk off Guadalcanal, 11 Oct 1942.

<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol V, p. 171.

<sup>9</sup> *Indiana*, US battleship (1942), 35,000 tons, nine 16-in, twenty 5-in guns, three aircraft, 27 kts.

*Enterprise* to take her place in the next naval encounter—the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands.

Indications of an impending major Japanese attempt on Guadalcanal were given in mid-October by air reconnaissance and coastwatchers' reports. Sightings on the 14th and 15th indicated strong enemy forces operating to the north-west of the Santa Cruz Islands, and including two or three battleships, at least one carrier, five or six cruisers, and destroyers. Three days later the "Daily Appreciation—Pacific and Indian Ocean Naval Activity", produced by Combined Operations and Intelligence Centre, Navy Office, Melbourne, noted that there were no further reports of enemy naval operations north of the Santa Cruz group, and continued:

The enemy force appears to have retired, after failing to draw Allied naval opposition. The tactical purpose of this force was evidently . . . to deal with any Allied naval force proceeding to Guadalcanal from the south-east, or alternatively to draw off the forces already operating in that area: the enemy task force appeared in the vicinity of Ndeni during the morning 14/10, and the landing on Guadalcanal followed on the morning of 15/10.

The inference as to the tactical purpose of the Japanese force was correct—the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Yamamoto, to his subordinate commanders were "to apprehend and annihilate any powerful forces in the Solomons area, as well as any reinforcements". The Japanese had "failed to draw" Allied naval opposition because the Americans were not then ready, as the Japanese themselves were not ready for their major stroke pending news of the capture of Henderson Field. This was promised to Yamamoto by the evening of the 24th, and again his naval forces resumed position for their part in the final subjugation of Guadalcanal, and C.O.I.C.'s "daily Appreciation" recorded for the 25th air sightings of

a strong fleet operating in three groups in the general area approximately 250 miles NW Santa Cruz Islands. Present Intelligence indicates that the forces include 12, 13, 14 ships respectively as follows: Force 'A', 2 aircraft carriers, 2 battleships, 2 heavy cruisers, 2 light cruisers, 4 destroyers; Force 'B', 3 battleships, 2 heavy cruisers, 2 light cruisers, 6 destroyers; Force 'C', 14 warships (no details).

But the Japanese army's promise to Yamamoto was not kept. The Americans on Guadalcanal defeated all attempts to take the airfield.

By this time the Americans had concentrated opposition. Task Force 16 (Rear-Admiral Kinkaid flying his flag in *Enterprise*) with battleship *South Dakota*<sup>1</sup> (which had arrived from the Atlantic some weeks earlier with *Washington*, but had suffered hull damage from a coral reef and had repaired at Pearl Harbour), cruisers *Portland* and *San Juan*, and eight destroyers, met Task Force 17 (Rear-Admiral George D. Murray in *Hornet*) with cruisers *Northampton*, *Pensacola*, *San Diego* and *Juneau*,<sup>2</sup> and six destroyers, on the 24th, some 200 miles east of the Santa Cruz Islands. Around 500 miles to the westward of them, between Rennell and

<sup>1</sup> *South Dakota*, US battleship (1942), 35,000 tons, nine 16-in and twenty 5-in guns, 3 aircraft, 27 kts.

<sup>2</sup> *Juneau*, US cruiser (1942), 6,000 tons, twelve 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 32 kts. Sunk off Guadalcanal, 13 Nov 1942.

San Cristobal Islands, was Rear-Admiral Willis A. Lee's Task Force 64, battleship *Washington*, cruisers *San Francisco*, *Helena*, *Atlanta*, and six destroyers. Halsey's instructions to Kinkaid, who was in operational command, were to sweep north of the Santa Cruz Islands and then change course to the south-west to be in a position to intercept enemy forces approaching Guadalcanal.

The Japanese striking force under Vice-Admiral Kondo—carriers *Shokaku*, *Zuikaku*, *Zuiho* and *Junyo*, battleships *Kongo* and *Haruna*, six cruisers and 23 destroyers—was 300 miles north of Guadalcanal awaiting news of the capture of Henderson Field. Ahead of Kondo was Rear-Admiral Abe's vanguard group of battleships *Hiyei* and *Kirishima*, four cruisers and seven destroyers.

The Americans were well served by Intelligence, and had information of Japanese positions on the 25th. Kinkaid was then west of the Santa Cruz Islands, with the Japanese carriers 360 miles to the north-west of him and unaware of his position. Throughout the night of the 25th-26th Kinkaid moved north-westerly. Just after midnight on the 25th air reconnaissance reported the enemy fleet about 300 miles to the north-west. With daylight both sides launched searches. Sixteen aircraft, each armed with a 500-lb bomb, took off from *Enterprise*. From them Kinkaid learned of Abe's presence at 6.30, and twenty minutes later received a report of the Japanese carriers less than 200 miles north-west of the Americans. The Japanese *Zuiho* was at this stage put out of action by bombs from the search planes, damage to the flight deck debarring her from operating aircraft.

Japanese sighting of the American carriers was simultaneous with Kinkaid's awareness of theirs, and the respective striking forces of aircraft launched by the antagonists passed each other in flight. The Japanese, first to launch, were first to reach their targets about 9 a.m. A providential rain squall concealed *Enterprise*, but *Hornet*, with no such shelter, received the undivided attention of the attacking aircraft. Despite fighter protection and anti-aircraft fire (which between them accounted for 25 of 27 bombers) the Japanese hit hard and accurately, with bomb and torpedo, and within ten minutes of the first bomb hit "the sky was clear of enemy planes" and in *Hornet* "fires were raging from bow to stern and from signal bridge to fourth deck. Torpedo hits had let in the sea and given the carrier an eight-degree list."<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile *Hornet's* aircraft reached the enemy carriers and scored bomb hits on *Shokaku* which crippled her and put her out of the war for nine months. They also hit cruiser *Chikuma*, wounding her enough to cause her retirement from the battlefield. The striking group from *Enterprise*—about half of which were shot down by enemy fighters when the opposing aircraft passed each other on the way to their targets—had no successes.

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<sup>3</sup> Morison, Vol V, p. 213.

The Japanese struck the final blows of the encounter. During the morning striking groups from *Zuikaku*, *Shokaku*, and *Junyo*, attacked *Enterprise* and her screen. The carrier suffered two bomb hits and a near miss which inflicted considerable damage and casualties, but did not destroy her effectiveness. *South Dakota*, cruiser *San Juan*, and destroyer *Smith*<sup>4</sup> were damaged. Ships sunk in the engagement were American—the destroyer *Porter*<sup>5</sup> torpedoed by *I 21* while she was picking up the crew of a shot-down bomber during the morning, and *Hornet*, further crippled by air attack while in tow during the afternoon and finally sunk by destroyers of Abe's force at 1.35 a.m. on the 27th. The Japanese suffered *Shokaku*'s ineffectiveness for nine months, and lesser damage to *Chikuma* and *Zuiho*. Both sides endured heavy aircraft losses and considerable casualties. As to the effect of the battle on the situation in the Solomons:

Measured in combat tonnage sunk, the Japanese had won a tactical victory, but other losses forced them back to . . . Truk. . . . The land assault against the Marines had ended in a fizzle; the sea effort had dangerously reduced Japanese air strength . . . the Battle of Santa Cruz Islands had gained priceless time for the Americans—days in which to reinforce and prepare.<sup>6</sup>

It was going to pay dividends.

The Battle of Santa Cruz did nothing to determine the Guadalcanal issue. On shore the Japanese could not take the Henderson Field. At sea neither side could ensure its ability to supply and reinforce its troops, nor deny the other access to the island. On 30th October Scott escorted to Guadalcanal transports carrying heavy artillery for the Marines; and between 2nd and 10th November the Japanese landed 65 destroyer loads and two cruiser loads of troops in western Guadalcanal. Each side determined to force the issue as soon as possible, and in the meantime each side ran in supplies and reinforcements. The main American effort at reinforcement was in the hands of Admiral Turner, and comprised three attack cargo ships which, escorted from Espiritu Santo by Scott in *Atlanta* with four destroyers, reached Lunga on 11th November, and four transports from Noumea commanded by Turner in *McCawley*, which, escorted by two cruisers and three destroyers, reached Lunga next day. Evidence of Japanese intentions was not wanting. On 7th November Read, the Australian coastwatcher at the north end of Bougainville Island, reported a convoy of 12 large transports headed south, and on the 10th his colleague Mason, overlooking Buin in the south of the island, told of "at least 61 ships this area, viz: 2 *Nachi*, 1 *Aoba*, 1 *Mogami*, 1 *Kiso*, 1 *Tatsuta*, 2 sloops, 33 destroyers, 17 cargo, 2 tankers, 1 passenger liner of 8,000 tons". Armed with photographs of silhouettes taken from the pages of *Jane's Fighting Ships* and dropped to him from aircraft, Mason produced identifications remarkable in their accuracy. His report, with others from air

<sup>4</sup> *Smith*, US destroyer (1936), 1,500 tons, four 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpdo tubes, 36½ kts.

<sup>5</sup> *Porter*, US destroyer (1936), 1,850 tons, five 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 37½ kts. Sunk off Santa Cruz Is, 26 Oct 1942.

<sup>6</sup> Morison, Vol V, p. 224.

reconnaissance, resulted in the build-up of an accurate picture of Japanese strength and probable intentions. Japanese Intelligence was similarly efficient.

To meet the Japanese threat Halsey concentrated formidable covering forces under Rear-Admiral Kinkaid for the seven transports and cargo ships which, with their support and escort groups of five cruisers and 14 destroyers, comprised the reinforcement groups. The covering forces were Kinkaid's Task Force 16, *Enterprise*, cruisers *Northampton* and *San Diego* and six destroyers, and Rear-Admiral Lee's Task Force 64, *Washington* (flag), *South Dakota*, and four destroyers. If *Enterprise* (still under repair at Noumea) could not reach the scene in time, the battleships of T.F. 64 would be detached for independent action.

In the event, that was what happened. Soon after the first reinforcement group of three attack cargo ships anchored off Lunga on 11th November, warning from the faithful coastwatchers on Bougainville prepared them for a dive-bombing attack in which few of the attackers escaped and no ship was hit. Next day, Turner's ships arrived and were unloading when a message from Mason at Buin told of another impending attack.<sup>7</sup>

Mason's warning forearmed Turner, and resulted in the decisive defeat of the attacking torpedo bombers, all but one of which were shot down. On the American side the cruiser *San Francisco* was crashed by a wounded aircraft, causing damage and casualties.

In the meantime air reconnaissance reported enemy surface forces to the northward, including carriers and battleships. Kinkaid's carriers and battleships were too far away to help, and Turner, conjecturing that the reported Japanese ships (because no transports were among them) intended a night bombardment of Henderson Field, decided to withdraw his transports, leaving the support group of four cruisers and eight destroyers—under Rear-Admiral D. J. Callaghan—plus *Atlanta* and Scott to oppose the Japanese.

Callaghan was in tactical command. The transports departed eastward through Lengo Channel at dusk, and after seeing them safely clear, Callaghan returned westward into the Sound to obstruct the passage of the Japanese past Savo. Callaghan—as was Crutchley before him—was bedevilled by the fact that few of his ships had previously operated together. He steamed in column formation: four destroyers in the van; then *Atlanta*, *San Francisco*, *Portland*, *Helena*, *Juneau*, in that order; and four destroyers in the rear. At 1.30 a.m. on Friday, 13th November, his column was steaming north-east by east parallel to the Guadalcanal coast, with Savo Island fine on the starboard bow distant some 10 miles, in much the same

<sup>7</sup> The work of the coastwatchers in these vital days for Guadalcanal was invaluable. At this period Mackenzie on Guadalcanal arranged for the landing of additional coastwatchers, and in October Lieutenant Josselyn and Sub-Lieutenant J. R. Keenan were landed on Vella Lavella, and Lieutenant Waddell and Sergeant C. W. Seton, A.I.F., were put on shore at Choiseul. Both parties were landed in enemy held territory from the submarine U.S.S. *Grampus*.

Keenan, R.A.N.V.R., was a patrol officer from New Guinea who joined the navy on his arrival in Australia from the territory.

Seton was a planter from the Shortland Islands who had joined the A.I.F. and had been seconded from his unit in Port Moresby, where his knowledge and experience were wasted.

position as was Crutchley's southern screening force in the early hours of 9th August. And steaming towards him at 23 knots, entering the Sound between Cape Esperance and Savo Island, was Admiral Abe's Japanese bombardment force, battleships *Hiyei* (flag) and *Kirishima*, screened by cruiser *Nagara* and 11 destroyers.

It was 1.40 a.m. on 9th August when Wight, on *Canberra*'s bridge, saw the explosion broad on the starboard bow which was the prelude to the first Battle of Savo Island. It was 1.40 a.m. on 13th November when Callaghan's van destroyer *Cushing*<sup>8</sup> (now steering due north, Callaghan having altered course thereto at 1.32 a.m.) sighted Japanese destroyers crossing ahead from port to starboard. Action was joined at 1.50 a.m. It opened with Japanese illumination of, and concentration of fire upon, *Atlanta*, who retaliated with accurate gunfire on enemy ships on both bows. But very shortly, *Atlanta*, torpedoed, savagely hit by gunfire, was out of the fight, immobile and shattered, with Scott among those killed on her bridge. From then on "Japanese and American ships mingled like minnows in a bucket"<sup>9</sup> in a general mêlée.

Within fifteen minutes of the opening clash, the main issue had been decided—there would be no bombardment of Henderson Field that night. The Americans had suffered, but on the Japanese side flagship *Hiyei* was crippled, and at 2 a.m. on the 13th Admiral Abe ordered both battleships to retire.

As a result of that first encounter the Americans lost *Atlanta*, and destroyers *Cushing*, *Laffey*, *Barton*<sup>1</sup> and *Monssen* sunk, had the cruiser *Portland* crippled, and *San Francisco* and other ships damaged, and among the killed counted both Admirals—Scott and Callaghan. Later in the day, as the effective survivors were retiring to Espiritu Santo, cruiser *Juneau* was torpedoed by submarine *I 26* and vanished in a vast explosion. On the Japanese side, *Hiyei* was immobilised a few miles north-west of Savo, destroyers *Akatsuki*<sup>2</sup> and *Yudachi* were sunk, other ships were damaged, and the mission was frustrated.

Neither side had time to lick wounds. The Japanese had intended the bombardment of Henderson Field to be a preparation for a large-scale reinforcement operation. Eleven transports carrying some 10,000 troops and large quantities of supplies, and escorted by eleven destroyers, the whole under the command of Rear-Admiral Tanaka, had left the Shortlands at nightfall on the 12th, but were recalled when the American opposition developed. Now, at 6.30 a.m. on the 13th, another bombardment group, Mikawa in *Chokai* with four heavy cruisers, sailed from the Shortlands to pave the way for the delayed landing to take place after nightfall

<sup>8</sup> *Cushing*, US destroyer (1936), 1,450 tons, four 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 36½ kts. Sunk off Savo Island, 14 Nov 1942.

<sup>9</sup> Morison, Vol V, p. 244.

<sup>1</sup> *Laffey* and *Barton*, US destroyers (1942), 1,620 tons, four 5-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts. Sunk off Guadalcanal, 13 Nov 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *Akatsuki*, Japanese destroyer (1932), 1,950 tons, six 5-in guns, nine 24-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts. Sunk off Savo Island, 13 Nov 1942.

on the 14th. At the same time arrangements were made to succour *Hiyei*, and for the main Japanese force under Vice-Admiral Kondo to cover the operation.

All day on the 13th American aircraft—from Henderson, from Espiritu Santo, and from *Enterprise* hurrying up from the south—hammered at whatever enemy targets were offering. Among them was *Hiyei* which, smitten by torpedoes and bombs, sank at 6 p.m. about five miles north-west of Savo. Mikawa's force, however, carried out its scheduled bombardment of Henderson Field on the night 13th-14th unopposed—though the field was still operational when they finished. Aircraft from it got some revenge at 8 a.m. on the 14th when they attacked the retiring Mikawa about 140 miles up "The Slot" and holed *Kinugasa* with a torpedo. Further hits in subsequent attacks sank this cruiser around 10 a.m., and damaged *Chokai* and *Maya*. Meanwhile Tanaka's Reinforcement Group also came in for punishment from the air, and "all day long the noise of battle roll'd" as flight after flight of aircraft from Henderson and from *Enterprise* unloaded their bombs on the transports. Tanaka lost seven of them that day, with all their supplies and many troops. He strove gallantly on with the remaining four, and eleven destroyers. Coming down astern of him was Kondo, with battleship *Kirishima*, four cruisers and destroyers, to bombard Henderson Field while Tanaka landed the remnants of his troops. At 6 p.m. on the 14th Kondo was about 100 miles north of Guadalcanal.

Twenty-four hours earlier Rear-Admiral Lee's battleship task force, T.F. 64, had detached from Kinkaid and hurried northward. Too late to intervene in Mikawa's bombardment Lee remained south-west of Guadalcanal during the 14th, and early in the evening, in column, destroyers leading *Washington* and *South Dakota* in that order, steamed north past Guadalcanal's western end, rounded Savo Island from the west northabout, altered course S.S.E. into the Sound to the east of Savo at 9.48 p.m., and at 8 minutes to 11, when about in the position where *Canberra* sighted the enemy on her fateful night, altered course to the westward to pass between Savo and Guadalcanal. Eight minutes later he made radar contact with a target nine miles distant to the northward. It was *Sendai*.

As he came speeding down "The Slot", Kondo had his force in three sections: cruiser *Sendai* and three destroyers three miles or so in the van; cruiser *Nagara* and six destroyers forming a close screen; and then the bombardment group of cruisers *Atago* (flag) and *Takao* and battleship *Kirishima*. Approaching Savo, the Japanese force was split when *Sendai* sighted Lee's force northbound to the west of the island and, making an enemy report, followed astern of the Americans with destroyer *Shikinami* while her two other destroyers, *Ayanami* and *Uranami*,<sup>3</sup> were detached to reconnoitre south of Savo. On receiving *Sendai*'s enemy report, Kondo detached *Nagara* and four destroyers from his screen as an advance-guard

<sup>3</sup> *Ayanami* and *Uranami*, Japanese destroyers (1929-30), 1,950 tons, six 5-in guns, nine 24-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts. *Ayanami* sunk off Savo Island, 15 Nov 1942; *Uranami* sunk in Leyte Gulf, 26 Oct 1944.



to replace the *Sendai* group, and ordered them to enter the Sound at full speed behind *Ayanami* and *Uranami*.

Action opened at 11.17 p.m. on 14th November, when the American battleships fired at *Sendai*, now visible to the northwards. The Japanese cruiser retired behind smoke. Five minutes later the American destroyers sighted and engaged *Ayanami* and *Uranami* steering eastward in the shadow of Savo, and shortly after became involved with the *Nagara* vanguard group also. Their position against the darkening backdrop of Savo Island favoured the Japanese ships, and they took heavy toll of their adversaries with gun and torpedo. Between 11.22 and 11.35 p.m. all four American destroyers—none of which fired a torpedo—were put out of action. Three of them, *Walke*, *Preston*<sup>4</sup> and *Benham*,<sup>5</sup> subsequently sank. One Japanese destroyer was fatally damaged.

The main forces clashed just before midnight, when Kondo, heading south-east for the southern entrance to the Sound, sighted *South Dakota* who, turning sharply to clear crippled and burning destroyers, had become separated from *Washington*, and briefly was the target for the guns of the three heavy enemy ships and suffered severe casualties and damage. Fortunately *Washington* was able shortly to intervene, and at midnight opened fire while the enemy ships were concentrating on *South Dakota*. She scored direct hits on *Kirishima* with nine 16-inch and about forty 5-inch shells, and within seven minutes the Japanese battleship was out of the fight, on fire and unsteerable. The engagement was brief, and by 25 minutes after midnight Kondo (less *Kirishima*) was retiring up "The Slot", while *South Dakota* was withdrawing to the south-west, and *Washington* closed the Russell Islands to the westward to draw off enemy interest that might remain in her consort. Only the remnants of Tanaka's Reinforcement Group remained in the Sound. By 4 a.m. on the 15th the four transports were grounded on the beach at Tassafaronga, and their troops landed—only some 2,000 of the 10,000 embarked got ashore. With daylight the Allied airmen started systematically wrecking the transports with bombs and destroying enemy supplies on the beach. Aircraft from *Enterprise* "were aided and abetted by Marine and Army fliers who entered into the game with great gusto but whose sporting instincts were so sorely tried by this necessary butchery, and by bloodstained waters covered with dismembered human members, that they retched and puked".<sup>6</sup> The eleven destroyers survived, and were safely back in the Shortlands by midnight on the 15th.

*Kirishima*, second Japanese battleship to be lost within 34 hours, was scuttled by her crew, and sank near to her sister *Hiyei* at 3.20 a.m. on the 15th. Damaged destroyer *Ayanami* was self-sunk also. *Washington* and *South Dakota*—this last with 91 casualties (39 fatal) and damaged

<sup>4</sup> *Preston*, US destroyer (1936), 1,450 tons, four 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 36½ kts. Sunk off Savo Island, 15 Nov 1942.

<sup>5</sup> *Benham*, US destroyer (1939), 1,500 tons, four 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts. Sunk off Savo Island, 15 Nov 1942.

<sup>6</sup> Morison, Vol V, p. 283.

to an extent that necessitated her proceeding to the United States for repair—met at 9 a.m. on the 15th at a pre-arranged rendezvous, and made for Noumea. Lee's force, like its predecessors in this series of actions in the Solomons, suffered from being a "scratch team, destroyer and battleship captains alike being unfamiliar with each other and with their commander".<sup>7</sup> The Americans sustained, over the whole battle, the greater loss of combat ships. But the two battleships and 11 transports lost by the Japanese were irreplaceable by them. The enemy, in the Battle of Guadalcanal, lost a decisive battle. Its conclusion marked the shift of the Americans from the defensive to the offensive in the Pacific war, and the end of any Japanese attempt to establish control of the seas washing the Solomons' shores.

## V

On 6th August 1942 General MacArthur issued Operations Instructions No. 15—New Guinea Force. They outlined the mission of the New Guinea Force with regard to the immediate defence of Australian New Guinea and the impending move over to the offensive, this entailing development at the earliest practicable date in the vicinity of Milne Bay of an amphibious force, equipped with small boats, for coastwise operations. The instructions continued:

With the amphibious force and overland detachments, and in conjunction with the Allied Air Forces, operate along the north-east coast of New Guinea with the objective of securing the coastline from East Cape to Tufi inclusive and be prepared, in conjunction with other forces upon later orders from this headquarters, to assist in the capture of the Buna-Gona area.

Operations Instructions No. 15, "in order to apply the principle of unity of command within the New Guinea Force", also directed the Commander Allied Naval Forces (Vice-Admiral Leary) to designate an officer as Naval Commander, New Guinea Force. Unfortunately there was a long delay before this was done. Not until 30th January 1943, as the result of a conference between representatives of G.H.Q., the Naval Board, and Comsouwespacfor, was the N.O.I.C. Port Moresby (Commander Hunt) designated Naval Commander, New Guinea Force, by the Commander Allied Naval Forces (now Vice-Admiral Carpenter, U.S.N., who had succeeded Leary as Comsouwespacfor on 11th September 1942). In designating the N.O.I.C. Naval Commander, Carpenter reviewed the function of Naval Officers-in-Charge of ports, each being

responsible in general for the movement and control of all shipping in his area except striking forces operating therein by direction of higher authority. In addition to provision of escort protection, this control includes routeing, time of entry and departure from harbour, assignment of berths and anchorages, arrangements for fuelling and watering, and harbour administration generally—but NOT cargo handling, stowage, etc.

Carpenter pointed out that, as a corollary to this, was the desirability of the N.O.I.C. being "included in discussions pertaining to operations of

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<sup>7</sup> Morison, Vol V, p. 282.

any nature involving coordination between land and naval units". Meanwhile, as late as 26th January 1943

although presumably Naval Adviser to General Officer Commanding New Guinea Force, N.O.I.C. Port Moresby is *not* consulted or informed regarding future operations. This means that all arrangements for transport of troops and equipment by sea are merely extemporised, and forward planning of naval requirements is impossible. It also reacts on the operation itself, as ships and men are not always available at short notice. This in turn leads to dissatisfaction on both sides and has produced a most unhappy atmosphere.<sup>8</sup>

The situation was complicated by the creation and activities of small ship groups, operating under various controls. By instruction of General MacArthur on 5th October, the Combined Operational Services Command was established, to operate under the control of the Commander, New Guinea Force, and to include all Australian Lines of Communication units and the United States Services of Supply. Among its activities were listed:

the coordinated utilisation of ocean shipping consisting of both large ships operated under the Army Transport Service of USASOS, and under Movement Control of the Australian Army, as well as small ships, trawlers, tug and harbour boats, operated under U.S. Advanced Base, the Australian Army Water Transport Group, and Angau. The action of C.O.S.C. with respect to large ships was concerned with coordination of shipping operations between New Guinea and the mainland of Australia, and of the employment on missions in this theatre of certain of these ships.<sup>9</sup>

There were thus too many cooks, and an overlapping of functions, particularly those of the Naval Officers-in-Charge and C.O.S.C., and resultant confusion and friction. It was stated in January 1943 (in the Agenda for the discussions between Carpenter and Royle) that

The Naval Board have not so far been informed of the functions of this body [C.O.S.C.] but it is understood that it includes

- (a) maintenance of lines of communication and supply,
- (b) maintenance of aerodromes, roads etc,
- (c) all new construction except in forward areas,
- (d) construction and development of port facilities,
- (e) maintenance and control of shipping services.

The main difficulty appears to be that C.O.S.C. officers are not prepared to obey instructions or meet the wishes of the Naval Officer-in-Charge in such matters as times of sailing, routing, berthing and harbour administration generally. Vessels operated by this Command are generally badly equipped with charts and navigational and signalling gear, and unforeseen demands for these causes embarrassment and friction.

Hunt's position was made invidious by the disparity in rank between him—an acting commander—and his fellow commanding officers in New Guinea. That of C.O.S.C. was an American brigadier-general, with an Australian brigadier as his deputy; the Australian Air Force commander was an air vice-marshal; the army commander was the Commander, Allied Land Forces, General Blamey, under whose direct command Hunt came

<sup>8</sup> Notes for Agenda for conference between Comsouwespacfor (Carpenter) and 1st Naval Member A.C.N.B. (Royle) at G.H.Q. Brisbane, 26th January 1943.

<sup>9</sup> D. McCarthy, *South-West Pacific Area—First Year*, p. 351.

—since, excepting striking forces and task forces, all naval forces in the area were an integral part of New Guinea Force—in all matters affecting operations in the area. The result was a tendency towards usurpation of naval functions which was productive of an unhappy situation in regard to forthcoming Buna-Gona operations.

Essential for these operations was a survey of the coastal waters between East Cape and Buna, since they were reef-studded and uncharted. In September MacArthur's headquarters directed "Ferdinand", a section of the Allied Intelligence Bureau (A.I.B.) of which the coastwatching organisation in the South-West Pacific was now a part, to carry out this work.

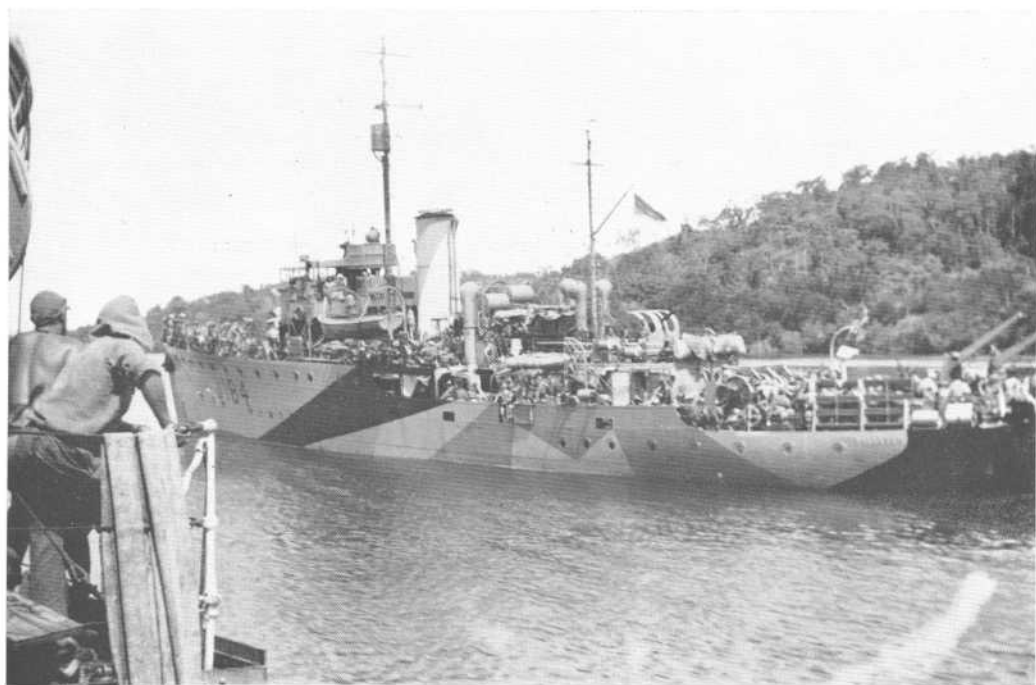
A.I.B. was conceived by Long, the Australian Director of Naval Intelligence, as a unit formed (in the interests of economy and efficiency in administration) from all Services, acting directly under MacArthur's headquarters, for carrying out activities behind the enemy lines. It would be supported by funds from the countries concerned, the resources of all being available to each. Long's ideas, outlined at a conference he convened in Melbourne of all concerned in Intelligence and related matters, were adopted. A.I.B. was born early in June 1942 as a G.H.Q. unit. Directly under Brigadier-General Charles A. Willoughby, MacArthur's Chief Intelligence Officer, it was controlled by an Australian, Colonel Roberts.<sup>1</sup> The coastwatching organisation in the S.W.P.A. became part of A.I.B., but that in the Soupac Area remained part of Australian Naval Intelligence. Commander Feldt, as S.I.O. (Supervising Intelligence Officer), was put in charge of the coastwatchers in both areas, responsible to Roberts for those in the S.W.P.A., and to Long for those in the Soupac Area. The coastwatching organisation had originally been formed with the intention that its members would report from behind their own lines. Now they were operating from behind the enemy's, being inserted there if not already in position; and to differentiate between purely naval Intelligence duties (which Feldt controlled as S.I.O.) and the activities behind the enemy lines of the coastwatchers for whom he was also responsible, the code name "Ferdinand"<sup>2</sup> was chosen for the latter tasks.

As stated earlier, MacArthur, in June 1942, had plans for an early attack on Rabaul. As a preliminary, G.H.Q. sought Intelligence of the objective, and Ferdinand was asked to place parties in position by November to observe Rabaul from all sides just before the attack. A vessel to carry the parties to their destination was sought. Choice was made of H.M.A.S. *Paluma*,<sup>3</sup> the examination vessel at Thursday Island, and the navy made her available. But in July the Japanese landed at Buna, and next month invaded Milne Bay. The Rabaul plan was shelved, and *Paluma*, which had been refitted and prepared for the Rabaul task, was now allotted

<sup>1</sup> Col. C. G. Roberts, MC. (1914-18: Lt RE.) DDMI AHQ 1941-42; Controller AIB 1942-44. Civil engineer; of Kew, Vic; b. Balmain, NSW (son of Tom Roberts, the artist), 31 Jan 1898.

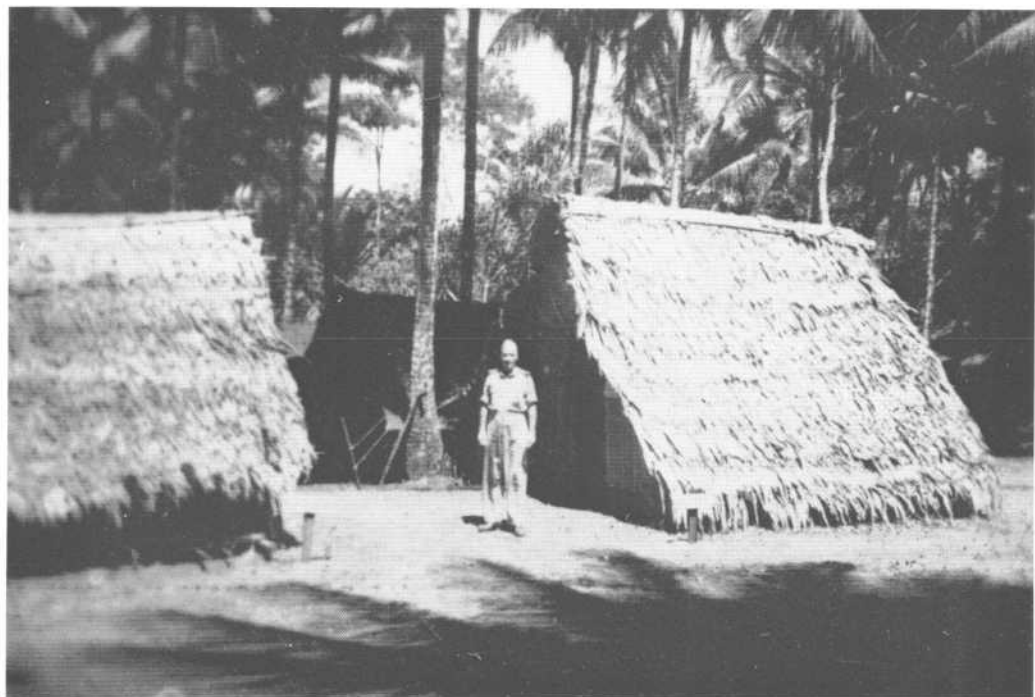
<sup>2</sup> Ferdinand was the name of a bull who did not fight but sat under a tree and smelled flowers, in one of the fantasies of the popular American artist, Walt Disney. It reminded coastwatchers that it was their job to sit unobtrusively gathering information.

<sup>3</sup> HMAS *Paluma*, examination vessel (1942), 45 tons, 11 kts.



(Author)

H.M.A.S. *Ballarat*, with troops of the 2/9th Battalion, leaving MacLaren Harbour, New Guinea, 14th December 1942.



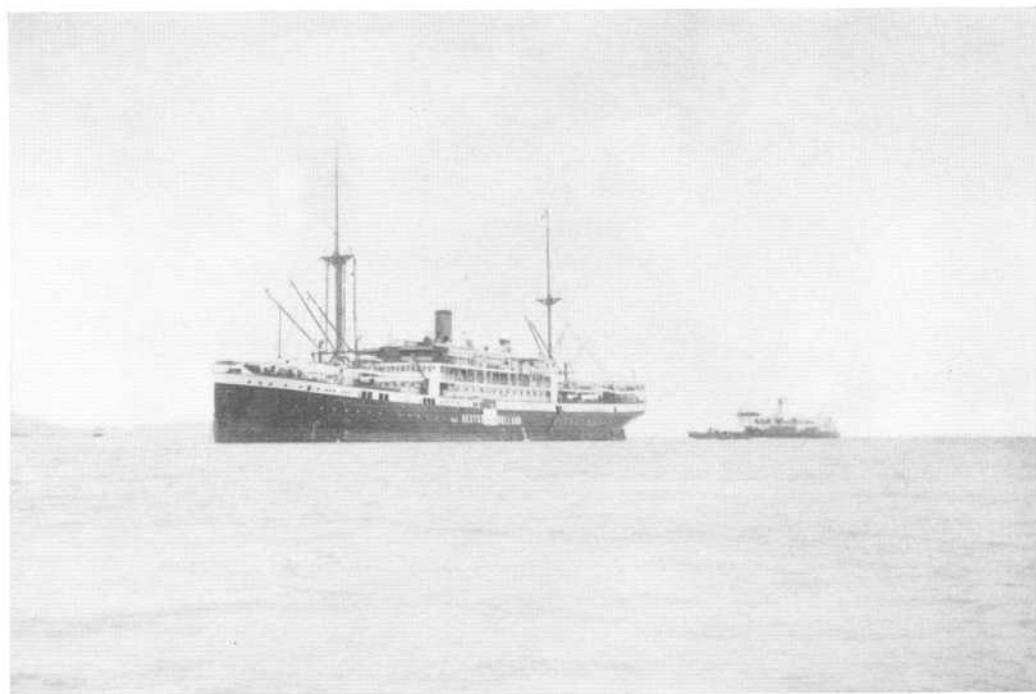
(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Navy Office, Oro Bay, with Commander C. J. R. Webb, N.O.I.C., 1943.



(Author)

Port War Signal Station, "Boogie Woogie Villa", Milne Bay.



(Ship's 3rd Engr Van Burok)

Dutch transport *Van Heutsz* in Oro Bay, 9th January 1943.

by G.H.Q. the job of carrying out the coastal survey between Milne Bay and Buna, installing necessary lights, and landing reporting parties. Lieutenant Champion (who on 9th April brought survivors out of New Britain after the Japanese invasion) was put in command of the ship and the survey work. The duties of *Paluma* were to make sketch surveys of reefs and locate suitable harbours for ships of up to 6,000 tons in the Cape Nelson area; buoy, beacon, and light reefs at essential points to ensure the safe passage of ships; guide and pilot ships through the resulting passages; and place shore parties to reconnoitre the coast and hinterland, establish teleradio stations, and tend navigational lights. Captain J. K. McCarthy, A.I.F. (it will be recalled that he played a prominent part in the rescue of survivors from Rabaul<sup>4</sup>) commanded the shore parties.

This project, as was remarked by the hydrographic authorities at Navy Office, Melbourne, when they learned of the G.H.Q. project late in September, would amount to a major survey, for which greater facilities than those proposed would be needed. Accordingly the Hydrographic Branch of the navy undertook surveys to establish the shortest safe navigable routes from Milne Bay into Goschen Strait and thence to Ward Hunt Strait. Lieut-Commander Tancred<sup>5</sup> was put in charge of the survey. Between 24th and 30th October in H.M.A.S. *Warrego* (Lieut-Commander Inglis<sup>6</sup>), Tancred established a safe navigable channel from Milne Bay to Cape Nelson through Goschen and Ward Hunt Straits, and also carried out surveys of the coasts of Goodenough Island. Meanwhile the *Paluma* party completed sketch surveys of suitable harbours in the Cape Nelson area up to Oro Bay, landed the shore parties, and established teleradio stations, lights and beacons. An American army officer, Lieut-Colonel H. W. Miller, was accommodated in *Paluma* to gain local knowledge, and accompanied one of the parties, commanded by Lieutenant Fairfax-Ross,<sup>7</sup> A.I.F., on reconnaissance from Porlock Harbour to Pongani. Throughout November and December Tancred continued survey work in the Cape Nelson area, with H.M.A. Ships *Stella* and *Polaris*.<sup>8</sup> It was the start of a survey task in which surveying ships of the R.A.N. were to spearhead the assaults of the Allies right through the S.W.P.A. to final victory.

First fruits of the survey were that, early in December, the first sizeable ships went through to Oro Bay. These were the Dutch *Karsik*, with tanks for the assault on Buna, soon followed by the first flight of operation LILLIPUT, which was set up by G.H.Q. Operations Instructions No. 21 of 20th October 1942, "to cover reinforcement, supply, and development of the Buna-Gona area upon its anticipated capture". To initiate this a

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<sup>4</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, pp. 545-9.

<sup>5</sup> Capt G. D. Tancred, OBE, DSC; RAN. Comd HMAS's *Wyrallah* and *Vigilant* 1940-41; Deputy OIC Hydrographic Branch, Sydney, 1941-42; in charge hydrographic surveys in New Guinea, Philippines and Borneo 1942-45. B. Nanango, Qld, 24 Jan 1907.

<sup>6</sup> Lt-Cdr A. D. C. Inglis; RAN and RN. HMAS's *Perth* 1939-40 and *Adelaide* 1940-42; comd HMAS's *Warrego* 1942-44, *Swan* 1944. B. Saltash, Cornwall, England, 16 Jul 1908.

<sup>7</sup> Maj B. Fairfax-Ross, CBE. 2/12 Bn and "M" Special Unit. Plantation inspector; of Rabaul, TNG; b. Springwood, NSW, 4 Apr 1910.

<sup>8</sup> HMAS's *Stella* and *Polaris*, survey vessels (1942), 111 and 50 tons respectively.

convoy was to be assembled at Milne Bay under New Guinea Force. The necessary and rapid build-up of Milne Bay was presaged by this. As stated earlier, Australian resident naval representation there in the early months was by a Beachmaster—first Lieut-Commander Stephenson and later Lieut-Commander Andrewartha. From this beginning a naval base staff now grew. Naval Intelligence was early represented there with the appointment in mid-October of Lieutenant Mogg<sup>1</sup> as N.I.O. In mid-November Commander J. L. Sinclair arrived to take up the appointment of Beachmaster, Oro Bay, in anticipation of LILLIPUT. Sinclair may be recalled as the former Singapore pilot who, as commanding officer of H.M.S. *Kedah*, led the withdrawal convoy to Singapore on the night 11th-12th February 1942.<sup>2</sup> He was seconded to the R.A.N. on his arrival in Australia after the fall of Singapore. The growing importance of Milne Bay was further evidenced by the arrival there on 26th November of Commander Branson<sup>3</sup> to assume the appointment of Naval Officer-in-Charge, thus superseding Andrewartha and the position of Beachmaster.

Plans for LILLIPUT were discussed at Headquarters, New Guinea Force, on 2nd November. It was decided that ships would be tactically loaded in Australia and sailed to Port Moresby, thence to Milne Bay, from where they would be sailed to Buna in flights of two vessels at a time, escorted by one or two corvettes. The first LILLIPUT convoy of nine ships<sup>4</sup> left Townsville in the evening of 15th November, escorted by H.M.A. Ships *Arunta*, *Ballarat* and *Katoomba*. About 130 miles S.S.E. of Moresby, at 7.30 p.m. on the 17th, the convoy split. Five ships proceeded to Moresby with *Arunta*, while the corvettes escorted the remaining four—*Japara*, *Balikpapan*, *Bantam* and *J. B. Ashe*—to Milne Bay, the three Dutch ships to form the first LILLIPUT flight to Buna.

## VI

On 27th November, General Blamey in a message to General MacArthur sought destroyer escort for the LILLIPUT ships north of New Guinea. Remarking that movement beyond Cape Nelson was risky, Blamey said that ships

should be protected from surface and submarine attack by destroyers operating under cover of land-based aircraft. If not desirable move out into Solomons Sea, a deep water passage exists from Milne Bay under cover of D'Entrecasteaux Islands.

The request was referred by MacArthur to Carpenter, and he rejected the suggestion that destroyers should be used. For this he had sound grounds. He had, just at that time, desired Crutchley to operate with

<sup>1</sup> Lt F. R. Mogg, RANVR; Naval Intelligence Officer, Milne Bay 1942-43. Commercial broadcasting manager; of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 13 Jan 1904.

<sup>2</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, pp. 567-9.

<sup>3</sup> Capt G. C. F. Branson; RN and RAN. HMS *Kanimbla*; NOIC Milne Bay 1942-43; "Z" Special Unit; comd HMS *Lothian* Nov 1944. B. Richmond, Surrey, England, 15 Nov 1900.

<sup>4</sup> *Maatsuyker*; *Cremer* (4,608 tons); *Bontekoe*; *Japara*; *Bantam*; *Balikpapan*; *Both*; *J. B. Ashe*; and *Jesse Applegate*. It will be remarked that the Dutch continued their valuable contribution in the SWPA. The seven LILLIPUT ships in this convoy were Dutch—as were nearly all the ships in LILLIPUT.



Task Force 44 in the Coral Sea in readiness to combat a possible Japanese diversion there to assist their forthcoming major attempt on Guadalcanal, or in case it was necessary to supplement Allied naval forces in the Solomons. The six destroyers of Desron 4—*Selfridge*, *Bagley*, *Patterson*, *Mugford*, *Henley*, and *Helm*—could thus not be released from their squadron duties. The immediate task in the Coral Sea was completed with the conclusion of the Battle of Guadalcanal, but another at once replaced it, that of the protection of LILLIPUT movements for which, on 15th November (the date LILLIPUT sailed from Townsville), Carpenter required a force of one cruiser and three destroyers continuously at sea south of New Guinea, and the remainder of Task Force 44 based at a reef anchorage at short notice for steam. That afternoon Crutchley sailed *Phoenix*, with *Mugford*, *Patterson*, and *Helm*, to operate in a rectangle embraced between the south-east tip of New Guinea and Cooktown on Cape York Peninsula, while the remainder of the force, *Hobart* (Flag),<sup>5</sup> *Selfridge*, *Henley* and *Bagley*, based on Challenger Bay, Palm Islands. Until the end of the year the two groups alternated in mounting a continuous Coral Sea patrol.

The only other two destroyers Carpenter had in eastern Australian waters were *Arunta* and *Stuart*, both engaged on convoy escort. But, further to lacking destroyers for the mission for which Blamey sought them, Carpenter rightly held that these ships were in any case unsuitable for use in the Milne Bay-Buna coastal area as things then were, with the area poorly surveyed and ill charted, and reef strewn to an extent limiting manoeuvre under air attack. Destroyers would constitute only a minor surface force when in the vicinity of Buna, where the enemy could easily concentrate much greater strength. He considered, said Carpenter, that corvettes were the best type of escort vessel to use, and that the greatest possible advantage should be taken of darkness both for passage and while unloading in the Buna area.

The LILLIPUT ships reached Port Moresby and Milne Bay on the 18th and 19th November respectively. But meanwhile the capture of Buna was held up, as thus were the LILLIPUT ships in their respective ports, and on 28th November those in Moresby disembarked their troops. A conference to discuss the situation was held at Headquarters New Guinea Force, on 1st December. Those present included representatives of the Australian and American army forces, the Fifth Air Force, with the navy represented by Hunt. Doubts were expressed by the air force representative as to whether adequate air cover could be provided for the LILLIPUT movement, and Hunt felt that with the lack of air cover the passage of ships, and their protection in harbour, would be hazardous. He suggested that small ships could be passed singly up the coast with a reasonable chance of escaping detection, and could approach the Buna area in darkness and unload until about noon, taking advantage of existing fighter cover. If their unloading was incomplete they could retire until nightfall to Porlock

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<sup>5</sup> *Australia* was undergoing five weeks' dockyard refit in Sydney.

Harbour which was protected against sea and air raids. It was agreed that it would be advantageous to commence ferrying supplies in small craft. The bigger ships could take over later.

On 10th December the LILLIPUT ships in Port Moresby started to discharge their cargo, and on the 13th the operation as originally planned was cancelled except for the first flight, and the Port Moresby ships returned to Australia. It was decided to send the ships of the first flight forward one at a time to Oro Bay at 48-hour intervals. Meanwhile small ships carried on, and it was in tending to one of these that Commander Sinclair was fatally wounded when enemy dive bombers attacked the motor vessel *Kurimarau* (288 tons) which he was piloting off Porlock Harbour on 6th December. *Kurimarau* was towing a barge carrying two 25-pounder guns which Captain Nix,<sup>6</sup> 2/5th Field Regiment, was trying to get forward from Oro Bay to Hariko, where they eventually arrived on the night of 8th December. Something of this story is recounted in the history of the 2/5th Field Regiment:

Spirits were ebbing fast [at Oro Bay] when the familiar *Kuri Marau* appeared on the scene again. At Milne Bay it was discovered that there had been a mistake; the vessel had been required at Porlock, of all places. Nix pressed his claims so vigorously that *Kuri Marau* soon started on its way to Hariko, the big, awkward barge blundering along in tow. . . . Just before dusk, three Jap planes came bombing and strafing. . . . The damage forced the ship to return to Porlock.<sup>7</sup>

Sinclair died in Port Moresby on 7th December. He was succeeded as Beachmaster, Oro Bay, by Lieut-Commander W.I.L. Legg, R.N.V.R., who left Port Moresby for Oro Bay in the Dutch *Karsik* on 8th December.

Two days earlier Blamey had discussed with MacArthur the opportunity offered by the shallow depth of the Japanese positions along the sea front from Cape Endaiadere to Buna, and it was decided to take advantage of this by landing a force on the beach. Writing to MacArthur on 8th December, Blamey recalled of the discussion that:

The two aspects considered were—

- (i) To endeavour to land tanks in rear of 32 US Div to attack from the south;
- (ii) To endeavour to land a force by night east of Buna to operate in conjunction with an attack by 32 US Div with tanks.

It will take approximately one week to prepare the operation.

The tanks can be landed and are expected to leave Moresby for Porlock today. [They did so, they were in *Karsik*.] They will be towed forward from there. Plans have been made for this and engineering and landing arrangements are in hand. There will be no movement between the hour of 1230 hours and darkness forward of Porlock.

The resources at my disposal in regard to landing a force are limited. At best I can muster small craft sufficient to move approximately 400 men and this at the cost of reducing maintenance. This is too small a force for the task. At least one full battalion should be used.

<sup>6</sup> Maj L. F. Nix, 2/5 Fd Regt; 1 Naval Bombardment Gp 1944-45. Solicitor; of Bondi, NSW; b. Brisbane, 8 Feb 1914.

<sup>7</sup> J. W. O'Brien, *Guns and Gunners* (1950), p. 175.

I submit it is the duty of the Navy—

(a) to move the force by sea,

(b) to take protective action to cover the landing.

This requires at least two destroyers and two corvettes. I understand that the Navy is reluctant to risk its vessels. I desire to point out that the Navy is only being asked to go where the Japanese have gone frequently.

Further there does not appear to be great risk in making an immediate reconnaissance both by sea and air by naval officers to select a reasonably safe route in view of the daily protection given by our Air Force.

Enemy destroyers when bombed in the vicinity of the proposed landing have moved freely in these waters without meeting with disasters from reefs or other sea dangers.

Preparations for the operation will be continued but unless the Navy is prepared to cooperate the risks are great owing to the reduced numbers that can be transported. It is somewhat difficult to understand the Navy attitude of non-cooperation because of risk. "Safety First" as a Naval motto—Shades of Nelson.

In so writing, Blamey was out of his depth, and less than just to the navy. He was in error when he remarked that "the navy is only being asked to go where the Japanese have frequently gone". The Japanese had not gone with destroyers over the route between Milne Bay and Buna inside the D'Entrecasteaux Islands. It will be recalled that when they attempted to land troops from Buna to make a flank attack on Milne Bay from the north at the end of August, the vessels used to transport the troops were barges. The Japanese cruisers and destroyers on their incursions into Milne Bay came straight down across the Solomon Sea, well to the east of the Trobriand Islands, and came in to Milne Bay from the north-east. The navy had already made "a reconnaissance by sea . . . to select a reasonably safe route", and was then engaged in making a detailed survey of the Cape Nelson area and beyond. Blamey remarked that enemy destroyers when bombed in the vicinity of the proposed landing had moved freely "without meeting with disasters from reefs or other sea dangers"; but it was the incompletely surveyed and reef-strewn stretch between that vicinity and Milne Bay that caused navigational concern to the navy—not the vicinity of Buna itself. The jobs of both the R.A.N survey group and the "Ferdinand" party had been to find a passage through the reefs, not to chart every reef in the area. As was remarked of their task: "In this operation we reversed the usual surveying procedure. Normally obstructions to navigation are charted—we found the clear water and did not fix the position of anything else."<sup>8</sup> It was the obvious procedure in circumstances when time was of the essence, but until a full survey could be carried out it limited the water in which the ships could navigate and manoeuvre. The position at Buna was different. The Japanese could run in there from the north—but even so they now avoided the actual vicinity of Buna for their landings, and carried these out farther north. That the navy did not fail to cooperate, and though not agreeing to use destroyers at this stage in the navigationally dangerous waters between Milne Bay

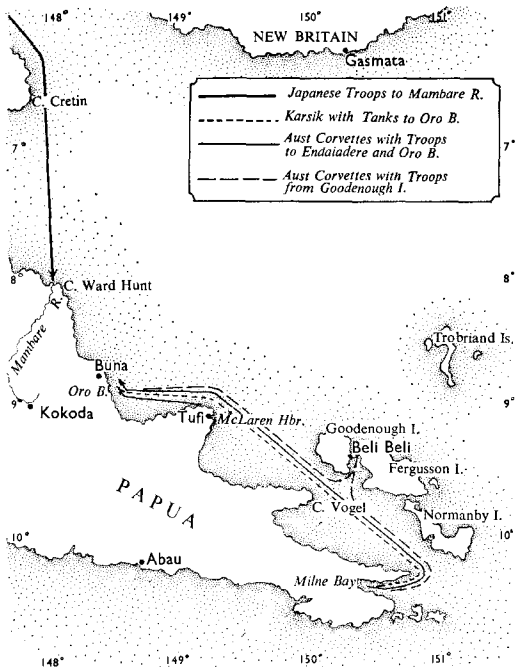
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<sup>8</sup> Feldt, *The Coast Watchers*, p. 189.

and Buna yet carried out its duty to move the tanks and the required battalions by sea, was made evident by the events of the next few days—even though General Blamey refused to admit it.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to moving the Allied troops forward where desired, the navy also endeavoured where possible to stop the enemy landing troops in the Buna area. On 26th November Intelligence indicated an enemy intention to run troops and supplies into Buna by submarines on the night 28th-29th. To circumvent this, *Katoomba* (Commander A. P. Cousin) and *Ballarat* (Lieut-Com-mander Barling), which left Milne Bay on the 27th escorting *Mulima* to Porlock Harbour where they arrived in the afternoon of the 28th, left there again immediately for Holnicote Bay, just west of Buna, and there carried out anti-submarine patrol throughout the night. No submarines were detected, but for an hour from 6.40 p.m. the two ships were subjected to intensive attacks by 10 dive bombers. Both ships were near-missed numerous times, the bomb explosions "lifting the ship out of the water",<sup>1</sup> but apart from some boiler and engine defects in *Katoomba* caused by the heavy jarring of near misses, suffered neither damage nor casualties. One Japanese aircraft was shot down, and two were damaged, by anti-aircraft fire. Cousin remarked in his report that "the excellent manoeuvrability of the corvettes appeared to surprise the Japanese pilots".

As stated above, the tanks for the attack on Cape Endaiadere were taken to Oro Bay in the Dutch *Karsik*. She left Milne Bay at 3 a.m. on 10th December, escorted by H.M.A.S. *Lithgow* (Commander A. V. Knight) who had *Champion* on board to assist with local knowledge, and who led *Karsik* through the surveyed channel to Spear Island, where



<sup>9</sup> At a press conference at HQ New Guinea Force on 21st December, when the tanks and the battalion were in action at Cape Endaiadere, General Blamey outlined the development of the attack on Buna, and the indications of the future Allied advance along the north coast. One of the pressmen suggested that the navy would probably come more prominently into the picture then. "The navy," said Blamey, "why the navy? The navy's done nothing so far."

<sup>1</sup> *Katoomba*, Letter of Proceedings.

Tancred embarked in the Dutch ship as pilot. At 10.35 p.m. the two ships arrived

off what was thought to be Oro Bay. *Karsik* however remained stationary throughout the night and I carried out A/S patrol in the vicinity. Steady heavy rain set in at 0130 Friday 11th, and at daylight entered Oro Bay and commenced off loading of tanks, ammunition and supplies. Our bombers were observed raiding the Buna area during the forenoon.<sup>2</sup>

*Karsik* completed unloading at noon on the 11th, and at 10.50 next morning both ships were back at Gili Gili in Milne Bay. They repeated the operation two days later, and left Milne Bay in the early morning of the 14th, reached Oro Bay that night, and were back in Milne Bay at 10 a.m. on the 16th. *Karsik*'s first trip with tanks to Oro Bay was designated "Operation Karsik"; the second was "Operation Tramsik".

At 8 p.m. on the 14th, when about 30 miles east of Oro Bay heading for their destination across Dyke Acland Bay, *Karsik* and *Lithgow* overhauled and passed three corvettes also bound for Oro Bay. They were solving Blamey's second problem, that of transporting a battalion of troops by sea and landing them east of Buna. H.M.A. Ships *Colac*<sup>3</sup> (Lieut-Commander Komoll,<sup>4</sup> Senior Officer), *Ballarat*, and *Broome* (Lieut-Commander Denovan<sup>5</sup>) with a total of 762 officers and men of the 2/9th Battalion, left Milne Bay at 3 a.m. on 13th December to land the troops as far forward as possible in the Buna area. Lieutenant Champion and Mr Molloy<sup>6</sup> embarked in *Colac* to act as pilots for the passage past Cape Nelson and in the Oro Bay-Cape Sudest area. Arrangements were made for the ships to meet eight landing barges (under the command of Lieutenant Verdon,<sup>7</sup> Assistant Beachmaster Oro Bay) off Cape Sudest, five miles south of Buna New Strip, at 11.30 p.m. on the 13th.

While this operation was afoot, a Japanese landing at the mouth of the Mambare River, just west of Cape Ward Hunt, 40 miles north-west of Buna, was in shape. A convoy of five destroyers (or two cruisers and three destroyers) with some 800 men of the *I Battalion, 170th Regiment* left Rabaul on the 12th. They were sighted at noon on the 13th approximately 85 miles N.N.W. of Madang, and were shadowed by air reconnaissance, but bad weather precluded attacks on them and at this stage they were last sighted off Cape Ward Hunt at 3.20 a.m. on the 14th.

Meanwhile the three Australian corvettes reached Cape Sudest at midnight on the 13th—the final approach through reefs north of Oro Bay being made at reduced speed, feeling the way with the help of Asdic

<sup>2</sup> *Lithgow*, Letter of Proceedings.

<sup>3</sup> HMAS *Colac*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Cdr S. B. Komoll, RANR. HMAS *Westralia* 1939-42; comd HMAS's *Colac* 1942-43, *Toowoomba* 1945. Ship's officer; of Sydney; b. Semaphore, SA, 3 Jan 1896.

<sup>5</sup> Cdr R. A. Denovan, MBE, VRD; RANVR. Comd HMAS's *St Giles* 1941-42, *Broome* 1942-45. *Grazier*; of Armidale, NSW; b. Killara, NSW, 1 Jan 1905.

<sup>6</sup> WO R. T. Molloy, RANR. Comd HMAS's *Winnilya* 1941-42 and *Bonthorpe* 1944; HMAS *Koala* 1945. Mariner; of Palmyra, WA; b. Coolgardie, WA, 14 Sep 1903.

<sup>7</sup> Lt R. A. Verdon, RANVR. HMS *Atmosphere*, HMAS *Toorie*; Asst Beachmaster, Oro Bay; HMAS *Wato*. Trade instructor; of Sandgate, Qld; b. Ryde, England, 18 Sep 1901.

echoes—and anchored one mile south-east of the cape. There was heavy overcast, through which, a few minutes after anchoring, unidentified aircraft close overhead began dropping parachute flares. One landing barge, with Verdon on board, came alongside *Colac* just after 1 a.m. on the 14th, and 46 troops were disembarked into it. Verdon, however, reported that owing to the inexperience of the barge crews (untrained American soldiers) and lack of navigational aids, it would probably be some two hours before the remainder of the barges arrived, and it would be impossible to complete the operation before daylight. All this time aircraft continued dropping flares. In view of the inability to complete the landing before daylight, the threat of air attack read into the continued flare dropping, and the reported proximity of the Japanese surface force, Komoll decided to postpone completion of the operation, and weighed and retired to the southward, directing *Ballarat* and *Broome* to follow. The three ships entered MacLaren Harbour, just north of Cape Tufi, soon after 9 a.m. on the 14th, their passage, from 3 a.m. to 6.15 a.m., being in a heavy electrical rain storm with visibility reduced to less than 100 yards. Back at Cape Sudest, Verdon landed his 46 men, collected his eight landing barges, and made towards Oro Bay. Soon after daylight his flotilla was bombed and machine-gunned by Boston aircraft from No. 22 Squadron R.A.A.F. Two of the barges were stranded, three made useless, and seven soldiers were wounded. The incident, which resulted from failure to inform the Fifth Air Force and C.O.I.C. Port Moresby of the operation, suggests that the decision to withdraw the three ships was a wise one, in view of the fact that they would still have been at anchor and discharging troops at the time of this attack on the barges.

Farther north the Japanese enjoyed an immunity from air attack which enabled them successfully to land their troops. Allied air attacks after daylight on the 14th sank some small landing craft the destroyers brought with them; and attacks were made on the destroyers during their retirement on the 14th, but without apparent result. That night the three Australian corvettes also landed their troops, this time at Oro Bay. They left MacLaren Harbour during the afternoon, crossed Dyke Acland Bay after dark, and skirted the land whose heavy honey scent reached out over a still sea, and followed *Karsik* into Oro Bay (*Lithgow* maintained anti-submarine patrol outside) just before midnight. Disembarkation was carried out with Verdon's remaining three landing barges and the ships' boats, and the three corvettes completed disembarkation and sailed by 5 a.m., with *Lithgow* and *Karsik* following a few minutes later, all to return to Milne Bay.

Between 16th and 19th December, *Colac*, *Ballarat* and *Broome* carried out a similar operation when they transported a total of 298 A.M.F. troops from Milne Bay to Porlock Harbour, and carried between them 699 officers and men of the 2/10th Battalion from Porlock to Oro Bay, where they disembarked them during the night 18th-19th. A few days later a third related move was made when *Colac*, *Broome* and *Whyalla*

(Lieut-Commander Oom<sup>8</sup>) proceeded to Beli Beli anchorage, Goodenough Island, and lifted thence 615 officers and men of the 2/12th Battalion (who, it will be recalled, had been disembarked there by *Arunta* and *Stuart* on 23rd October) to land them in the early hours of 29th December at Oro Bay. Thus, between the 11th and 29th December the corvettes and *Karsik* landed eight tanks, and 2,076 troops at Oro Bay. By the time those from Goodenough Island were landed there, the tanks, and the troops of the first two flights, had for days been in fierce and bloody action against a brave and fanatical enemy at Cape Endaiadere and on to Buna, which fell to the combined attacks of the Australians from the south-east and the Americans from the south just after the turn of the year. When, on 2nd January 1943, the 2/12th gathered at Giropa Point, their casualties

brought the total losses in the three 18th Brigade battalions to 55 officers and 808 men for the period 18th December to 2nd January inclusive—about 45 per cent of the numbers with which the units had first arrived on the Buna coast, although these numbers had been augmented during the sixteen days by the arrival of some reinforcements and the return of original members of the battalions. It was a heavy cost by any standards, particularly so by those of bush warfare.<sup>9</sup>

So, by the end of the year, the plan discussed in Blamey's letter of 8th December to MacArthur was brought to fruition, with the cooperation of the navy. Here, as in the Solomons, the question of reinforcement and supply was the deciding one; and here, as in the Solomons, it was answered in favour of the Allies, though not without them receiving some hard knocks.

## VII

One such hard knock, while the situation was developing along the New Guinea coast from East Cape to Buna, was suffered by the Americans when the last major sea battle in the southern Solomons, Tassafaronga, was fought during the last hour of November 1942. As with its predecessors, it arose out of a Japanese attempt to run reinforcements into Guadalcanal. On 30th November coastwatcher Paul Mason in southern Bougainville reported that two light cruisers and at least six destroyers had left the Buin area during the night 29th-30th, and the C.O.I.C. "Daily Appreciation" commented that "it is probable that an attempt is being made to land troops on Guadalcanal", an assumption strengthened by the fact that Mason's report followed a build-up of enemy shipping in the Buin-Shortlands area. On the strength of this Halsey (who had been promoted Admiral a few days earlier because of his success and the growing importance of his command) directed Rear-Admiral C. H. Wright, U.S.N., in command of a cruiser force (heavy cruisers *Minneapolis*, *New Orleans*, *Northampton*, and *Pensacola*, light cruiser *Honolulu*, and four destroyers) to sail from Espiritu Santo to intercept a Japanese force which might

<sup>8</sup> Cdr K. E. Oom, OBE; RAN. Comd HMS *Gleaner* 1941-42, HMAS's *Whyalla* 1942-43, *Shepparton* 1943; OIC Hydrographic Branch 1943-46. Of Sydney; b. 27 May 1904.

<sup>9</sup> McCarthy, p. 484.

include transports, might be destroyers only, and could reach the Tassafaronga area before 11 p.m. on the 30th. The Japanese force was, in fact, of eight destroyers under Rear-Admiral Tanaka, carrying a few troop reinforcements, and 1,100 drums of supplies. These drums were to be jettisoned off Tassafaronga, and there recovered by small craft operating from the beach, and the operation was to be one of a series every four days for the next fortnight. Japanese and Americans met in the velvet darkness of a still, calm night, with the surface of the Sound like a black mirror; it was just after 11 p.m. on the 30th. The Japanese, preparing to jettison their supply drums, were steering north-easterly at 12 knots some two miles off shore at Tassafaronga. The Americans, steaming in column at 20 knots and steering north-westerly, were some four to five miles to seaward of the Japanese. Action opened at 11.21, when the American destroyers fired torpedoes, followed almost immediately by gunfire from the cruisers. The Japanese destroyers replied with the weapon with which they were superior to the Americans—the torpedo; and within minutes the blackness was dispersed by the yellow glare of starshells, the vivid lightning of gunfire, and the towering torches of burning ships. The four American heavy cruisers, sorely smitten by torpedoes, were put out of action. One—*Northampton*—was sunk. The other three were under repair for nearly a year. The Japanese lost the destroyer *Takanami*.<sup>1</sup> Some of the drums of supplies were jettisoned, but whether they reached their intended destination is not known. By 1.30 a.m. on 1st December Tanaka and his surviving destroyers were clear of the Sound, and were back in Shortland Harbour before noon.

Tassafaronga was a tactical victory for the Japanese, but their strategical defeat in the southern Solomons was complete, and a similar situation was developing for them in New Guinea. For a while they continued their attempts to reinforce Guadalcanal, and the “Tokyo Express” adhered to its four-day schedule and made a successful run on 3rd December. But by now the Americans were building up light forces. A motor torpedo boat (P.T. boat) base was established at Tulagi, whence light forces swooped to supplement the efforts of air attack against the “Tokyo Express”. (In December, four P.T. boats were also based on Milne Bay. The noise of their engines as they manoeuvred in the bay on arrival on the night of 12th December brought the shore anti-aircraft batteries into action under the impression that there were low-flying aircraft in the vicinity, and for a few minutes the night was noisy and vivid with the thud and flash of gunfire. Later in the month they based farther forward at Tufi.) On 7th December Tanaka’s attempted supply run with eleven destroyers was thwarted and abandoned after air and P.T. boat attacks; and another attempt on the 11th was also defeated, with the Japanese loss of the destroyer *Teruzuki*.<sup>2</sup> It was the last surface engagement of the year in the Solomons. Meanwhile the Japanese were developing a submarine supply

<sup>1</sup> *Takanami*, Japanese destroyer (1941), 1,900 tons. Sunk in battle of Tassafaronga, 30 Nov 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *Teruzuki*, Japanese destroyer, 2,450 tons. Sunk in Solomons, 12 Dec 1942.



system, both in the southern Solomons and in New Guinea. A scheme was worked out whereby drums of supplies, released from a submerged submarine, rose to the surface and were retrieved by shore parties. Also "freight tubes", carrying two tons of supplies and with a range of 4,000 yards, piloted by one man, were released from submerged submarines. From November 1942 to February 1943 this scheme operated in the southern Solomons, with a submarine sailing daily from Buin, on Bougainville, to Kamimbo on the north-west tip of Guadalcanal. A similar submarine supply line was instituted to Buna. In January 1943 about 20 submarines, including most of the latest type, were engaged on supply duties.

It was against this Buna supply line that *Ballarat* and *Katoomba* operated in Holnicote Bay on 28th November. They then encountered no submarines, but there were other occasions more fortunate for the Allies. On the night of 9th December a P.T. boat sank a 2,000-ton blockade running submarine, *I 3*,<sup>3</sup> near Cape Esperance on Guadalcanal; and on 24th December one of the Tufi-based boats—*PT 122*—sank *I 22* off Gona.

The end of 1942 saw the tide beginning to flow for the Allies. The battle of communications—for control of the seas—was yet to be won, but the turning point in the all-important war against the submarine had been reached with improved Allied anti-submarine equipment, including ASV (aircraft to surface vessel radar) and with the rapidly growing output of merchant tonnage from Allied shipyards. In 1942 submarines sank approximately 6,250,000 tons of Allied shipping; in the same period British (1,843,000 tons) and American (5,339,000 tons) building was short of losses by nearly 1,000,000 tons. The monthly total of tonnage sunk by submarines reached the highest figure of the war in November 1942—119 ships of 729,160 tons. But thereafter it fell, and the Allies were shown that "the foundation of all our hopes and schemes . . . the immense ship-building programme of the United States"<sup>4</sup> was a firm foundation. During 1943 the curve of new tonnage rose sharply. It outgrew losses by submarine in the first few weeks of the new year, and the second quarter of the year saw, for the first time, U-boat losses exceed their rate of replacement.

The Russian victory at Stalingrad in February 1943 was the end of Hitler's hopes of a military conquest of Russia. The surge of Allied victories in North Africa was soon to carry them across the Mediterranean to Sicily and Europe, and open the Canal route again to save the long haul round the Cape of Good Hope. Everywhere the Allies were on the march. The road stretched a long way ahead, but clouds were lifting, and sunshine made more clearly discernible the distant goal.

<sup>3</sup> *I 3*, Japanese submarine (1926), 1,955 tons, two 4.7-in guns, 24 kts. Sunk off Guadalcanal, 9 Dec 1942.

<sup>4</sup> Churchill, Vol V (1951), p. 4.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE SUPPLY LINES BATTLE

EVENTS in the battle of communications, which in its main implication was one of supply both of troops in the field and civilian population at home, led to a major change in the German naval command early in February 1943. With the German invasion of Russia in June 1941, the northern supply line to that country became of outstanding importance, and in August 1941 the British inaugurated the "PQ-QP" convoys sailing from Iceland to Murmansk and Archangel. When America entered the war three months later, her merchant ships took part in these Russian convoys, but the convoys remained a British naval responsibility. By the end of 1942, 20 Russia-bound convoys had sailed with a total of 301 merchant ships (53 were sunk), and 16 convoys left Russia with a total of 232 merchant ships (12 were sunk), and in the last quarter of 1942 an additional 13 ships sailed to north Russia independently (only five arrived) while 23 returned independently, with only one lost. In December 1942 the designation of these convoys was, for security reasons, changed from "PQ-QP" to "JW-RA". "PQ18" was the last of her series. The new series sailed from Loch Ewe, on the north-west coast of Scotland, instead of as previously from Iceland, and the first, "JW51A", of 16 ships escorted by seven destroyers and five smaller ships, sailed on 15th December, was not sighted, and reached Murmansk on Christmas Day.<sup>1</sup>

It was "JW51B", the succeeding convoy of 14 ships, which was the cause of the German command changes. "JW51B" sailed a week after its predecessor and experienced both heavy weather and enemy surface attacks by the German heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper* and pocket battleship *Lutzw*, and six destroyers. The attacks were opposed by the destroyers of the convoy's escort and a covering force of two six-inch cruisers, *Sheffield* and *Jamaica*.<sup>2</sup> In a series of clashes on New Year's Eve, which ended with withdrawal of the German force, the Germans lost the destroyer *Friedrich Eckholdt*<sup>3</sup> and suffered considerable damage to *Hipper*. The British lost the destroyer *Achates*<sup>4</sup> and minesweeper *Bramble*,<sup>5</sup> but the convoy arrived intact at Kola Inlet on 3rd January.

Three days later, at Hitler's headquarters in Berlin, the infuriated Fuehrer (whose first knowledge of his ships' failure was received from an English news broadcast) in a conference with Admiral Raeder, in which "the Commander-in-Chief, Navy, rarely had an opportunity to

<sup>1</sup> In the 19 convoys which reached Russia between their inauguration in September 1941 and the end of 1942, 125 of the 301 merchant ships were British. Most of the remainder were American.

<sup>2</sup> HMS *Jamaica*, cruiser (1940), 8,000 tons, twelve 6-in and eight 4-in guns, 33 kts.

<sup>3</sup> *Friedrich Eckholdt*, German destroyer (1937), 1,625 tons, five 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 36 kts. Sunk 31 Dec 1942.

<sup>4</sup> HMS *Achates*, destroyer (1930), 1,350 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. Sunk 31 Dec 1942.

<sup>5</sup> HMS *Bramble*, fleet minesweeper (1938), 875 tons, two 4-in guns, 17 kts. Sunk 31 Dec 1942.

comment",<sup>6</sup> belittled the achievements of the German Navy in the two world wars, condemned it for not fighting the New Year's Eve action through to a finish, and declared that the defeat spelt the end of the German High Seas Fleet. He directed Raeder to prepare a memorandum on the advisability of scrapping the capital ships. Raeder resisted the intention, but to no avail, and on 30th January resigned the command he had held for fourteen years. Hitler appointed Grand Admiral Doenitz, Flag Officer Commanding Submarines, as Raeder's successor. Doenitz shortly submitted to Hitler a scheme (which was approved) for stopping new construction of large surface ships, and decommissioning most of those then in commission, thus releasing 250 officers and 8,000 men, many of whom would be used for submarines. And the new Commander-in-Chief was reported to have told the German Naval Staff when assuming his appointment that the entire resources of the German Navy would henceforth be put into the service of inexorable U-boat warfare.<sup>7</sup> But before the end of February Doenitz had modified his views regarding big surface ships, and at a conference on the 26th of the month he secured Hitler's grudging consent to keep the new battleship *Tirpitz*, *Lutzow* and battle-cruiser *Scharnhorst* in commission, and to send the last named to join the other two in Norway to form a task force to operate against the Archangel convoys. Hitler asked how soon a convoy target might be found. Doenitz thought within the next three months. Hitler commented: "Even if it should require six months, you will then return and be forced to admit that I was right."<sup>8</sup>

As results of this German change in command the Admiralty decided to retain in the Atlantic the battleship *Malaya*, which it had intended to send to the Eastern Fleet in case the Germans decided to back their U-boat campaign with a more active policy by surface ships; and on 9th February the Australian Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Royle, told the Advisory War Council that there were then 95 U-boats operating in the Atlantic<sup>9</sup> and that he thought that anti-submarine measures should be given first priority by the Allies. His comments were made in a discussion on a supply problem which arose locally through the resumption of Japanese submarine attacks on Australian coastal shipping.

## II

At half-an-hour after noon on 17th January the Union Steamship Company's *Kalingo* (2,047 tons) left Sydney for New Plymouth, New Zealand. At 1 a.m. on the 18th, when about 110 miles east of Sydney, in bright moonlight with moderate wind and sea and considerable southerly swell,

<sup>6</sup> *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 6 Jan 1943.

<sup>7</sup> *Brassey's Naval Annual*, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 5 Mar 1943.

<sup>9</sup> An Admiralty source gave the figure of 105 boats operating in the Atlantic early in February 1943. The effects of this concentration were soon felt. In January 1943 (partly due to bad weather) U-boat sinkings totalled 29 ships, of 181,769 tons. In February these figures rose to 47 ships of 296,217 tons. And in March (the worst month since November 1942) to 88 ships of 524,629 tons.

she was struck by a torpedo amidships, and at once began to settle. Her attacker (who surfaced some two cables distant but made no other hostile move) was *I 21* of the *Eastern Area Advanced Force*. An S.O.S. was broadcast, but "the aeriels seemed to be all mixed up and his receiver was also out of order so that the operator did not know if the message got through",<sup>1</sup> and it was never received. Twenty minutes after the torpedo hit, the master, Captain H. Duncan, ordered "Abandon ship". The fore and after decks were awash, and the ship down by the head with a heavy starboard list. She sank soon afterwards. Thirty-two of the crew of 34 got away in a boat (two firemen were killed by the explosion) and reached Sydney late in the afternoon of the 19th. The N.O.I.C. (Muirhead-Gould) boarded the tug which took the survivors up the harbour, and the captain's report remarks of the admiral's talk with the crew: "I would like to state that they did not keep anything back in reference to the Navy not finding us"; though the Navy could hardly be blamed for the *Kalingo's* wireless failing to function.

Some 21 hours after sinking *Kalingo*, *I 21* got her second victim when she torpedoed the American tanker *Mobilube* (9,860 tons) 60 miles from Sydney at 9.50 p.m. on the 18th. The torpedo, which struck under the port quarter, killed three of the engine-room watch, but it failed to sink the ship, which was successfully towed to port. The submarine's third quarry, the American *Peter H. Burnett* (7,176 tons), also remained afloat and subsequently reached port. Bound from Newcastle to U.S.A., she was some 420 miles east of Sydney when, at 9.55 p.m. on 22nd January, *I 21's* torpedo struck her on the starboard side. Its effects were minimised by her wool cargo. The ship was abandoned. Four of the boats returned when it was seen that she was not going to sink. The occupants of the other boat were subsequently rescued. The ship's wireless alarms were received, but her estimated position was incorrect and it was some time before she was found and, on the 26th, taken in tow by the U.S. destroyer *Zane*,<sup>2</sup> with H.M.A. Ships *Gympie*<sup>3</sup> (Lieut-Commander Patterson<sup>4</sup>) and *Mildura* (Lieutenant Guille<sup>5</sup>) providing anti-submarine escort. Various ships attended her during the tow to Sydney. H.M.A.S. *Deloraine* (Lieut-Commander Weston<sup>6</sup>) towed part of the way, and the French *Le Triomphant* also lent a hand screening. She eventually reached Sydney in tow of the tug *St Aristell* on 2nd February. There was one fatal casualty.

At the meeting of the Advisory War Council on 9th February, the Minister for Supply and Shipping (Mr Beasley<sup>7</sup>) said that the transport

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Master, Captain H. Duncan.

<sup>2</sup> *Zane*, US destroyer (1921), 1,190 tons, four 4-in guns, 35 kts.

<sup>3</sup> HMAS *Gympie*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Cdr C. W. J. Patterson, VRD, RANR. HMAS's *Beryl II*, *Durraween*, *Coolebar*; comd HMAS *Gympie* 1942-43. Insurance inspector; of Melbourne; b. Adelaide, 18 Mar 1907. Died 26 Mar 1959.

<sup>5</sup> Lt-Cdr C. J. P. Guille, OBE; RANR and RNR. HMAS *Perth* 1940-41; comd HMAS's *Mildura* 1942-43, *Wagga* 1944-45. Of Southampton, England; b. Southampton, 17 Mar 1908.

<sup>6</sup> Cdr H. J. Weston, DSC; RANR. HMAS's *Yarra* and *Gawler*; comd HMAS's *Deloraine* 1942-44, *Hawkesbury* 1944-45. Sea pilot; of Melbourne; b. Lichfield, England, 13 Aug 1907.

<sup>7</sup> Rt Hon J. A. Beasley. Minister for Supply and Shipping 1941-45, for Defence 1945. B. Werribee, Vic, 9 Nov 1895. Died 2 Sep 1949.

of iron ore on the Australian coast was already difficult, and if more ships were lost the position would be serious. He was referring to the sinking by *I 21* the day before of the B.H.P. steamer *Iron Knight* (4,812 tons) which, with a cargo of iron ore from Whyalla for Newcastle, was torpedoed 21 miles from Montague Island at 2.25 a.m. on the 8th. *Iron Knight* was in convoy "OC68" at the time, of ten ships escorted by H.M.A. Ships *Mildura* (Senior Officer) and *Townsville*<sup>8</sup> (Lieutenant Farquhar-Smith<sup>9</sup>). *Iron Knight* was leading ship of the starboard column, and *Townsville* was seven to eight cables on her starboard beam. The torpedo, whose wake was sighted from *Townsville*, passed under the corvette and struck *Iron Knight* under the bridge, and with her dead weight cargo she sank within two minutes. Of her complement of 50, *Le Triomphant* subsequently rescued 14 from a raft. The other 36, including the master, Captain D. Ross, and all deck and engineer officers, went down with the ship. Discussing this sinking at the Advisory War Council meeting on the 9th, Royle said that the escort of two corvettes for ten ships was considered reasonable. "With the resources at present available, the only method of increasing surface escort would be to reduce the number of convoys, and if the position became acute this would have to be considered."

To offset the paucity of surface escorts as far as possible, air escort was provided for ships sailing in groups as distinct from being in convoy, and on 9th February three American ships—*Jim Bridger* (7,180 tons), *Archbishop Lamy* (7,176 tons), and *Starr King* (7,176 tons)—were to leave Sydney in company and be covered during daylight by one aircraft. *Starr King* was some two hours late, and so did not enjoy direct air cover since there was no other aircraft available. *Jim Bridger* and *Archbishop Lamy* were personally conducted until 8.14 p.m. on the 9th, when, then approximately 100 miles from Sydney, the aircraft left them. Next morning four R.A.A.F. Hudsons took off from Camden to carry out a diverging search to a depth of 180 miles from Sydney and at 9.48 a.m. one of these sighted, about 150 miles east of Sydney, "a Liberty ship sinking rapidly". It was the laggard *Starr King*, torpedoed three and a half hours earlier by *I 21*. She had been struck by two torpedoes at one hour interval. The new Tribal-class destroyer, H.M.A.S. *Warramunga* (which, built at Cockatoo Island, was launched on 7th February 1942, commissioned by Commander Dechaineux<sup>1</sup> on 20th November 1942, and was now based on Sydney while working up) sailed from Sydney and reached the stricken American ship in the early afternoon of the 10th. *Starr King*'s crew—there were no casualties—had abandoned ship, which was down by the stern and awash to the bridge structure, but with the arrival of *Warramunga* they returned on board and an attempt was made by the

<sup>8</sup> HMAS *Townsville*, corvette (1941), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>9</sup> Lt-Cdr A. Farquhar-Smith, RD; RANR. HMAS's *Kanimbla*, *Lithgow* and *Vendetta*; comd HMAS's *Townsville* 1942-44, *Cowra* 1945. Ship's officer; of Sydney; b. Bournemouth, England, 9 Aug 1916.

<sup>1</sup> Capt E. F. V. Dechaineux, DSC; RAN. Comd HMS's *Vivacious* and *Eglinton* 1940-41, HMAS's *Warramunga* 1942-44 and *Australia* 1944. Of Hobart; b. Launceston, Tas, 3 Oct 1902. Died of wounds, 21 Oct 1944.

destroyer to tow *Starr King*; but it was unsuccessful, and she sank at 2.30 a.m. on the 11th, and *Warramunga* returned to Sydney with her survivors. She was the last of *I 21*'s victims. The submarine subsequently claimed to have sunk six ships during this patrol, but the only other sinking recorded in this period was that of the American *Samuel Gompers* (7,176 tons) south of New Caledonia on 29th January. She was probably the victim of *I 10*, which was operating in that area at the time.

The withdrawal of *I 21* left Australian coastal waters quiet for some weeks, and not until April were submarine attacks resumed, when the conclusion of the Guadalcanal campaign freed boats from supply duties there, and *I 177* and *I 178* commenced operating on the east coast, shortly to be joined by *I 180*,<sup>2</sup> *I 174*, and *I 26*. The first intimation of the renewal of activity was when convoy "OC86", Melbourne to Newcastle, was attacked 19 miles from Cape Howe at 2 p.m. on 11th April. Of 13 ships, "OC86" was escorted by H.M.A. Ships *Moresby* (Lieutenant Brown<sup>3</sup>) and *Bendigo*. Except for the fact that it was daylight, the attack was similar to that by *I 21* on convoy "OC68" two months earlier—as was its result. Leading ship of the starboard column was the Yugoslav *Recina* (4,732 tons) with a cargo of iron ore from Whyalla for Newcastle. She fell a victim to *I 177*. The torpedo struck on the starboard side and the ship "sank in less than one minute. The explosion caused a high cloud of iron ore dust and the ship disappeared before the cloud cleared."<sup>4</sup> *Moresby* carried out a fruitless attack on an anti-submarine contact, and later picked up 10 survivors from *Recina*. The 32 lost in the ship included an R.A.N. rating, A.B. Gunner Skully.<sup>5</sup>

At 6.17 p.m. on 24th April convoy "BT54", of five ships, left Moreton Bay for Townsville escorted by the American submarine chasers *SC738* and *SC747*.<sup>6</sup> At 7.30 p.m. on the 25th, N.O.I.C. Brisbane received a signal from *SC747*: "Send planes to search for survivors *Kowarra* sunk by submarine 35 miles north east Sandy Cape 1900K/24. Eleven aboard *SC747*, 24 missing." It was the first intimation received on shore that the Australian Steamship Pty Ltd steamer *Kowarra* (2,125 tons), sailing independently from Bowen to Brisbane with a cargo of sugar, had been sunk. She was a victim of *I 26*, which operated off the Queensland coast in the second half of the month. By the time the news reached shore *Kowarra* had been on the bottom for 24 hours. Torpedoed at 7 p.m. on the 24th, she sank almost immediately.<sup>7</sup> Of her complement of 32,

<sup>2</sup> *I 177*, *I 178*, *I 180*, Japanese submarines (1942-43), 1,500 tons, one 4.7-in. gun, 23 kts. *I 177* sunk off Palau Is, 19 Nov 1944; *I 178* sunk off Solomons, 25 Aug 1943; *I 180* sunk off Alaska, 26 Apr 1944.

<sup>3</sup> Lt-Cdr C. H. Brown, RANR. Comd HMAS's *Heros* 1940-41, *Moresby* 1942-44, *Wilcannia* 1944, *Bungaree* 1944-45. Asst harbour master; of Melbourne; b. Halesworth, England, 29 Mar 1894.

<sup>4</sup> Signal from NOIC Sydney to Comsouwespacfor, 12 April 1943.

<sup>5</sup> AB Gunner J. G. Skully, PA394. HMAS *Narani*; *Recina*. Of Adelaide; b. Greytown, SA, 28 Jan 1915. Lost in sinking of *Recina*, 11 Apr 1943.

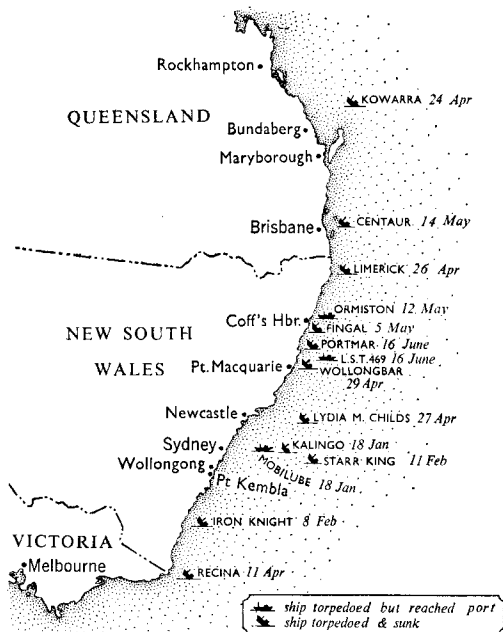
<sup>6</sup> *SC738* and *SC747*, US submarine chasers (1942), 95 tons, one 40-mm gun, 20 kts.

<sup>7</sup> Survivors from *Kowarra* reported that the ship was struck by two torpedoes, one on each side, practically simultaneously, and that after she sank two large submarines surfaced. The senior surviving officer, Mr Hugh Hughes, however, made no reference to this in his Report, and stated that his first intimation of the torpedoing was feeling "a terrific thud". There is no suggestion in his report of two explosions.

eleven were picked up by SC747 at about 6.30 p.m. on the 25th. Twenty-one, including the master, Captain Donald MacPherson, and the D.E.M.S. gunner, Able Seaman Hair,<sup>8</sup> R.A.N.R., were among the 21 lost.

At the time *Kowarra* was sunk, convoy "GP48", of five ships escorted by *Colac* (S.O.E.) and *Ballarat* (Lieutenant MacLeman<sup>9</sup>), which left Sydney at 10.47 a.m. on the 24th, was off Newcastle, heading northwards at 9½ knots. Late on the 25th, when the convoy was approaching Evans Head, about 150 miles south of Cape Moreton, signals were intercepted telling of the torpedoing of *Kowarra*. The five ships of the convoy were steaming three in line abreast, with the other two, *Limerick* (8,724 tons) and *Reijns*, astern respectively of the port and centre leaders. *Colac* and *Ballarat* were respectively to port and starboard of the convoy. No contacts resulted from constant Asdic sweeps. *Limerick*, owing to an engine defect, was unable to proceed at less than 10 knots, which meant that she had to zigzag from time to time to keep station.<sup>1</sup>

At 1.4 a.m. on 26th April, when the convoy was about 20 miles south-east of Cape Byron, a torpedo, from abaft the beam, struck *Limerick* amidships on the port side. Its track was seen from the bridge just before it hit. *Limerick*'s master, Captain F. L. G. Jaunay, was below at the time, and when he reached the deck he found the ship had a heavy list to port and "most of the crew had jumped or were jumping overboard". *Colac* got no contact which could be classified as submarine, but dropped two depth-charges to keep the attacker down, and closed *Limerick* where Jaunay and a few of the crew who remained on board tried to put out a fire at No. 4 hatch. Throughout the night (while



Japanese submarines off eastern Australian coast, 1943

<sup>8</sup> AB J. F. Hair, PM2017. *James Cook, Dilga, Caradale, Kowarra*. Of Coburg, Vic; b. Coburg, 30 May 1920. Lost in sinking of *Kowarra*, 24 Apr 1943.

<sup>9</sup> Lt-Cdr D. MacLeman, RANR. HMAS *Ballarat* (comd 1943). Ship's officer; of Sydney; b. Avoch, Scotland, 21 Aug 1908.

<sup>1</sup> Some two years earlier, on 7th May 1941, HMAS *Stuart* was escorting convoy "AN30" from Alexandria to Crete, a task "made difficult by the fact that one of his charges, *Rawnsley*, could not steam at more than eight knots while another, *Losslebank*, could not steam at less than eleven".

*Ballarat* proceeded with the convoy), *Colac* picked up from the sea survivors from *Limerick* and, at first light, tried to pass lines to take the torpedoed ship in tow. But the sea was rising and lines could not be passed, and at 6.3 a.m. *Limerick* sank. Captain Jaunay jumped overboard as she went, and was picked up by *Colac*. From then until 9.25 a.m., when the search was abandoned, *Colac* "proceeded to pick up survivors who were mostly clinging to dunnage and scattered over a wide area". In all, of *Limerick's* complement of 72, *Colac* took 70 on board. The third officer and fourth engineer were lost. *Limerick's* sinking was 270 miles from that of *Kowarra*, but it is likely that *I 26*, who claimed two victims in her brief patrol, was again the attacker.

On 4th April the American Liberty ship *Lydia M. Childs* (7,176 tons) left San Francisco for Sydney en route to the Middle East with Lend-Lease supplies. She was nearing her Australian destination when, at 6.45 p.m. on 27th April, about 90 miles east of Newcastle, she was torpedoed, probably by *I 177*, which operated off the New South Wales coast in April and claimed to have made one victim. *Lydia M. Childs* sank within 15 minutes of being hit, but her entire complement of 62 got away in five boats and some rafts, and were subsequently rescued by H.M.A. Ships *Warrnambool* and *Deloraine*. *Lydia M. Childs* was on her maiden voyage, and Lieut-Commander Read,<sup>2</sup> *Warrnambool's* commanding officer, remarked in his report that "her boats were very well found and had a number of modern appliances which were completely new to me".

The North Coast Steam Navigation Company's steamer *Wollongbar* (2,239 tons), sailed from Byron Bay for Newcastle, in the evening of 28th April. At 10.40 a.m. on the 29th, off Port Macquarie, she was torpedoed—probably by *I 180* which was on patrol in the area from the end of April until mid-May—and sank with the loss of 32, including the master, Captain Charles Benson, and the D.E.M.S. gunner, Able Seaman White,<sup>3</sup> R.A.N.R., out of her complement of 37. It was probably *I 180*—which claimed two victims—which, on 5th May, sank the Norwegian steamer *Fingal* (2,137 tons) off Nambucca Heads, about 60 miles north of *Wollongbar's* sinking. *Fingal*, from Sydney for Darwin with military cargo, was being escorted by U.S.S. *Patterson* which was zigzagging ahead of her charge while an aircraft gave cover to seaward when, at 1.35 p.m., in fine clear weather and smooth sea, a torpedo exploded under *Fingal's* port quarter. Twenty seconds later a second torpedo hit in the engine-room, and the ship sank within one minute. Nineteen survivors of her complement of 31 were picked up by the American destroyer after she had delivered a depth-charge attack and searched vainly for some time for the submarine. *Fingal's* master, chief officer and all the engineers were among those lost.

<sup>2</sup> Cdr N. R. Read, RAN. HMAS *Australia*; comd HMAS's *Doomba*, *Bingera*, *Kybra*, *Warrnambool*, *Stuart*, *Gascoyne* and *Whyalla* 1940-45; comd HMAS *Ballarat* and SO 21 MS Flotilla 1945-46. Of Springhurst, Vic; b. "Bedooba Station", Cobar, NSW, 10 Dec 1903.

<sup>3</sup> AB D. F. White, H610. *Zealandia*, *Brisbane Star*, *Wollongbar*. Of Collinsvale, Tas; b. Collinsvale, 23 Aug 1914. Lost in sinking of *Wollongbar*, 29 Apr 1943.



## III

As stated above, Admiral Royle, at the Advisory War Council meeting of 9th February, said that if the submarine position on the Australian coast became acute, the number of surface escorts per convoy would have to be increased by decreasing the number of convoys. This was now done, and on 13th May he told the Council that, following representations by the Shipping Control Board and the Department of Commerce, it had been decided to revert to double convoys, each of which would be provided with four escort vessels, "the maximum protection that could be provided with present resources". One such convoy, "PG50", of eleven merchant ships escorted by H.M.A. Ships *Colac*, *Bendigo*, *Moresby* and *Ballarat*, was then on passage from Brisbane to Sydney and, the day before, had been under attack from a submarine—again possibly *I 180*. "PG50" formed up at the end of the swept channel into Moreton Bay at 3.15 p.m. on the 11th. At 2.12 p.m. on the 12th, when off Coff's Harbour—and when the convoy had the additional protection of air escort—the Australian ship *Ormiston* was struck by a torpedo which exploded and badly holed the port side of No. 1 hold. The ship, however, remained afloat and able to manoeuvre under her own power, and *Ballarat* escorted her to Coff's Harbour while *Moresby* searched unsuccessfully for the attacker, and *Colac* and *Bendigo* continued with the convoy. Another Australian ship in this convoy, *Caradale* (1,881 tons), was also hit by a torpedo from the salvo fired in this attack; but it failed to explode, and did no damage. *Ormiston*, proceeding under her own power at three to four knots, was subsequently escorted to Sydney, where they arrived on the 15th, by *Ballarat*, U.S.S. *Henley*, and H.M.A.S. *Kybra*.<sup>4</sup>

That afternoon of 15th May the N.O.I.C. Brisbane, Captain E. P. Thomas, received a signal from the American destroyer *Mugford* saying that she was 40 miles east of Cape Moreton and was picking up many survivors of the Australian hospital ship *Centaur*, which had sunk at 4 a.m. on the 14th. "More details later." It was the first intimation of the torpedoing of the *Centaur* with the loss of 268 lives—the biggest individual loss from a Japanese torpedo suffered in Australian waters during the war.

At 2 p.m. on the 15th *Mugford* was escorting the British steamer *Sussex* (11,063 tons) clear of Australian coastal waters on a trans-Tasman voyage. An Avro-Anson aircraft of the R.A.A.F. was providing A.S.V. protection. A lookout in the destroyer reported an object ahead on the horizon, and "shortly thereafter the plane was seen to dive toward the object previously reported and headed toward *Mugford* signalling 'Rescue survivors in water ahead'."<sup>5</sup> From the survivors on the first group of rafts Lieut-Commander H. J. Corey, *Mugford*'s captain, learned that they were from *Centaur*, and he requested the aircraft to cover *Sussex* until well

<sup>4</sup> HMAS *Kybra* (1926), 858 tons; owners Government of Western Australia. Commissioned in RAN as tender to HMAS *Rushcutter*, 30 Sep 1940.

<sup>5</sup> From report of CO of *Mugford*, Lieut-Commander H. J. Corey, USN.

clear while he proceeded with the work of rescue "amidst the usual flurry of reported 'periscopes', 'disturbed water', 'torpedo wakes'. Although none proved authentic, minimum time was spent stopped." The survivors were

in two large groups plus three smaller groups in about a two mile radius of oil slick, wreckage and debris. Regular gas drum rafts, hatch tops, cabin tops, gratings, large shelf structures, and one wrecked lifeboat (awash) had been used by the survivors, many lightly clothed, some naked, some injured and burned, and about half with life jackets. One other lifeboat, bottom up, was seen.

In a search continued throughout daylight over a large oval area roughly seven by fourteen miles, *Mugford* rescued 63 men and one woman: 29 ship's crew; 34 army medical personnel, including one nurse, Sister Savage;<sup>6</sup> and one Torres Strait pilot. Those lost were 45 of the ship's crew, including the master, Captain G. A. Murray; and 223 medical personnel, including 11 nurses. On board *Mugford* the rescued were given medical treatment, clothed, sparingly fed, and put to bed. "Sister Savage wished to aid in the treatment of other survivors, but was persuaded to desist and receive treatment herself." *Mugford* berthed at Brisbane on 15th May and handed the rescued over to N.O.I.C.'s chief staff officer, Lieut-Commander McManus.<sup>7</sup> "*Mugford's* ship's company," recorded Lieut-Commander Corey, "collected the sum of £239 plus which was given Lieut-Commander McManus R.A.N., for the survivors' immediate needs, besides donations of requisite clothing, cigarettes, soap etc." *Mugford's* search of the area was thorough, and Corey said on arrival at Brisbane that he held out little hope of there being any other survivors. A supplementary search of the area, carried out until 6 p.m. on the 16th by U.S.S. *Helm*, H.M.A.S. *Lithgow*, and four motor torpedo boats, confirmed this view.

*Centaur*, a motor passenger ship of 3,222 tons, owned by the Ocean Steamship Company Ltd, and registered at Liverpool, England, had formerly been in the West Australia-Singapore trade. She was made available by the Ministry of War Transport for conversion to a hospital ship in January 1943, for use in the New Guinea area, and was taken over on the 9th of the month. She was allotted the Geneva Convention identification number 47, and this was painted on each bow during conversion. All the necessary formalities were completed, and on 23rd January the Foreign Office, London, was told that she would commission on 1st March, and was asked to pass particulars of the ship to enemy powers. This was done, and on 5th February the Protecting Power, Switzerland, passed the information to the Japanese Government.

*Centaur* left Melbourne on her maiden voyage as a hospital ship on 12th March 1943. She arrived at Port Moresby via ports on 13th April, and was back in Sydney on 8th May. She left there on her second voyage

<sup>6</sup> Lt Ellen Savage, GM; AANS. Nurse; of Gordon, NSW; b. Quirindi, NSW, 17 Oct 1912.

<sup>7</sup> Cdr J. C. B. McManus, OBE; RAN. (HMAS's *Yarra* and *Una* 1915-19.) Supervising Intell Officer, NE Area 1943-45. Farmer; of Penrith, NSW; b. Echuca, Vic, 11 Mar 1892.

for New Guinea on 12th May, the 257 military personnel on board comprising 65 medical staff and the 2/12th Field Ambulance numbering 192.<sup>8</sup> At approximately 4 a.m. on Friday, 14th May, she was off Brisbane, with Point Lookout, on Stradbroke Island, bearing W.S.W. distant 24 miles,<sup>9</sup> when she was struck without warning by a torpedo from a Japanese submarine. The weather was fine and clear, and visibility good. *Centaur* was brightly lit and properly marked in accordance with Article 5 of the Hague Convention for the Adaptation of the Principles of the Geneva Convention to Maritime Warfare. The torpedo struck well down in an oil fuel tank on the port side abaft No. 2 hatch, and the ship caught fire immediately, and sank within two or three minutes. She made no signals, and there was no time to launch any boats, though two broke adrift from the ship when she went down. At the time of the torpedoing most of those on board were asleep and had little chance of escape in the sudden disaster. The survivors were for some 36 hours in the water, clinging to debris, before they were rescued. No torpedo track was sighted, nor was any submarine seen at the time of the attack, but three of *Centaur's* crew, including the second officer, Mr R. G. Rippon, stated that they heard the motors of what they considered to be a surfaced submarine between midnight and 4 a.m. on 15th May. Two of them—Able Seaman J. Cecich and Seamen's Cook F. Martin—claimed that in addition to hearing the motors they sighted the submarine. There is no question but that a submarine was the attacker. The depth of water, the prevailing circumstances, and the practical operation of mine warfare precludes any possibility of there having been enemy minefields in the position of the sinking.

At intervals between April and June 1943 the five Japanese submarines mentioned earlier operated off the east coast of Australia. They were *I 26* of the *1st Submarine Squadron* in the Brisbane area during the second half of April (she claimed two victims, probably *Kowarra* and *Limerick*); and four boats of the *3rd Submarine Squadron*—*I 177* in April (she claimed one victim, probably *Lydia M. Childs*); *I 180*, end of April to mid-May (she claimed two sinkings, probably *Wollongbar* and *Fingal*, but she could also have sunk *Centaur*); *I 174* from the end of May to mid-June (she claimed two sinkings which would most likely have been—as will be seen below—*Portmar* (5,551 tons) and *LST469*); and *I 178*, April to June (she claimed no sinkings, but could have been responsible for the loss of *Centaur*).

Japanese records claim seven ships sunk off the east coast of Australia during the period April-June, and Australian records agree with that

<sup>8</sup> The fact that members of the A.A.S.C. boarded the ship with rifles gave rise to widely circulated rumours that armed troops were in *Centaur* when she was torpedoed. But the carrying of arms "for the maintenance of order and defence of the wounded and sick" was in accordance with Article 8 of the "Convention for the Adaptation of the Principles of the Geneva Convention to Maritime Warfare".

<sup>9</sup> The route which was allotted to *Centaur* before she left Sydney would, had she followed it, have taken her some 20 miles to seaward of this position. The senior surviving officer of the ship's company, Mr R. G. Rippon, the second officer, told the Staff Officer (Intelligence) Brisbane that the ship's master had considered that the route given to *Centaur* "was mainly for merchant ships, and that it would take him too far off-shore. The master therefore had decided to use a route of his own choosing."

figure—plus *Centaur*, for which Japanese records do not acknowledge responsibility. *Centaur* was torpedoed at approximately 4 a.m. on Friday, 14th May. At 6.30 p.m. on Saturday, 15th May, Tokyo Radio broadcast, *inter alia*:

Domei from Rome says anti-Axis countries have repeatedly attacked hospital ships in the Pacific and Mediterranean Sea and already eight Italian hospital ships have been sunk. These were all clearly marked. None of the 40 Italian hospital ships have escaped attack by anti-Axis nations.<sup>1</sup>

The Tokyo broadcast some 38 hours after the torpedoing of *Centaur*, accusing the Allies of attacks on hospital ships, could have been a coincidence. On the other hand it suggests an attempt to forestall an Australian announcement and condemnation of the attack, an attack the Japanese have never admitted. Either *I178* or *I180* would appear to have been the culprit, with the former the probability. Of the five boats operating off the Australian east coast between April and June, *I178* was there throughout the whole period, longer than any of the other four. Yet she was the only one for whom no victims are claimed in Japanese records. She was, too, the only one which failed to return from the operations off the east coast of Australia, April-June 1943. On 25th August she was sunk, south-east of the Solomon Islands, by U.S.S. *Patterson*.<sup>2</sup>

The attack on *Centaur* raised again the question of the distinctive marking of hospital ships. In some circles it was considered that hospital ships should have Geneva Convention markings painted out, should be blacked out at night, and should be escorted. But the Chiefs of Staff both in Britain and in America decided that it was in Allied interests that the immunity of hospital ships should be maintained, and reprisals avoided. The *Centaur* incident could, it was held, have been the act of an irresponsible commander. This attitude would certainly seem to have been the correct one.

#### IV

It was a fortnight after the sinking of *Centaur* before submarines again made their presence known on the east coast of Australia. Evidence is that two boats were then operating, *I178*, and *I174* which arrived in the area at the end of May and remained until mid-June. At 9.18 p.m. on the 29th *Mildura*, one of the four escorts of the 17-ship convoy "OC95" from Melbourne to Newcastle, reported torpedo tracks when 35 miles N.N.E. of Cape Howe. About an hour and a half later, some 300 miles

<sup>1</sup> On 14th January 1942 the *Imperial General Headquarters* communiqué claimed that the hospital ship *Harbin Maru* was sunk by an Allied submarine in the South China Sea on the morning of 10th January. In a signal of 6th June 1943 the Admiralty informed the Australian Naval Board that the Japanese had lodged a protest against alleged attacks on five other hospital ships in the Pacific between January and April 1943. Another Japanese reference to hospital ships during the period was in the communiqué of 20th February 1942, reporting the first Darwin air raid the day before, and stating: "The Imperial Navy air route units refrained from attacking a hospital ship in the harbour." But in that attack *Manunda* suffered one near miss and one direct hit in dive-bomber attacks, was badly damaged, and had 59 casualties, 12 fatal. On the other hand, when Japanese ships *Tenryu* and *Arashi* shelled and sank *Anshun* in Milne Bay on the night of 6th September 1942, though they illumined *Manunda* with searchlights they did not molest her.

<sup>2</sup> *German, Italian and Japanese U-boat Casualties during the War*. White Paper, Cmd. 6843, June 1946.

to the northward at 10.48 p.m., the American Liberty ship *Sheldon Jackson* (7,176 tons) nearing the end of her voyage from the United States, had two torpedoes fired at her when about 150 miles N.E. by N. of Sydney. Both missed. The next encounter was in the forenoon of 4th June, when the American *Edward Chambers* (4,113 tons) and a surfaced submarine exchanged gunfire—fruitless on both sides—in a position 30 miles south-east of Cape Moreton. In this instance the submarine was probably *I 174*. She certainly (with her claim of two victims) was the boat concerned in the sinking of *Portmar* on 16th June.

Convoy "GP55", Sydney to Brisbane, of 10 merchant ships and three American Landing Ships (Tank)—L.S.T's—left Sydney at 8.45 a.m. on 15th June. The convoy was in five columns abreast, with two ships in each of the two wing columns and three each in the other three. Second ship in the fourth column from port was the American *Portmar*, a survivor of the first Darwin air raid of 19th February 1942, and which, damaged and beached there, was subsequently towed to Sydney and repaired. Next astern of her now in convoy "GP55" was *LST469*. Escorts were the five corvettes *Warrnambool* (S.O.E.), *Deloraine*, *Kalgoorlie*, *Cootamundra* (Lieutenant Johns<sup>3</sup>), and *Bundaberg*<sup>4</sup> (Lieut-Commander Pixley<sup>5</sup>). During the voyage *Portmar* had straggled badly, and when the convoy was 35 miles east of Smoky Cape at 5.15 p.m. on the 16th, she was trying to pick up station, and was just passing to port of *LST469* to take up position ahead of her. She was slightly abaft the beam of the L.S.T. when that ship was struck by a torpedo on the starboard quarter, and those in *Portmar* saw another torpedo approaching from abaft the starboard beam. Before evading action was effective this torpedo struck *Portmar* in the wake of No. 1 hatch. The ship, with a cargo including petrol and ammunition, burst into flames, was abandoned, and sank in about ten minutes with the loss of two lives. Seventy-one survivors were picked up by *Deloraine*, while *Warrnambool* and *Kalgoorlie* carried out depth-charge attacks until contact was lost. Meanwhile *LST469* though badly damaged and immobile—and with 26 killed and missing and 17 injured—remained afloat. *Deloraine* took her in tow, but deteriorating weather parted the tow, and *Deloraine* took the *Portmar* survivors and the L.S.T's wounded to Coff's Harbour, leaving the L.S.T. in *Kalgoorlie*'s charge, while *Warrnambool* rejoined the convoy. *Deloraine* subsequently returned to the scene of the attack and carried out an anti-submarine search with *Kalgoorlie* throughout the 18th and 19th, being joined in this by H.M.A.S. *Vendetta*. The tug *Reserve*,<sup>6</sup> dispatched from Brisbane in the evening of the 16th, took the L.S.T. in tow and arrived with her in Sydney on the 20th.

<sup>3</sup> Lt-Cdr G. A. Johns, RANR. HMAS *Moresby*; comd HMAS's *Cootamundra* 1943-44, *Wilcannia* 1945. Master mariner; of Merewether, NSW; b. Newcastle, NSW, 24 Mar 1909.

<sup>4</sup> HMAS's *Cootamundra* and *Bundaberg*, corvettes (1942-43), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>5</sup> Cdr N. D. Pixley, MBE, VRD; RANR. HMAS *Doomba*; comd HMAS's *Nambucca* 1942, *Bundaberg* 1942-44, *Echuca* 1944-45. Asst manager, shipping company; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 21 Sep 1905.

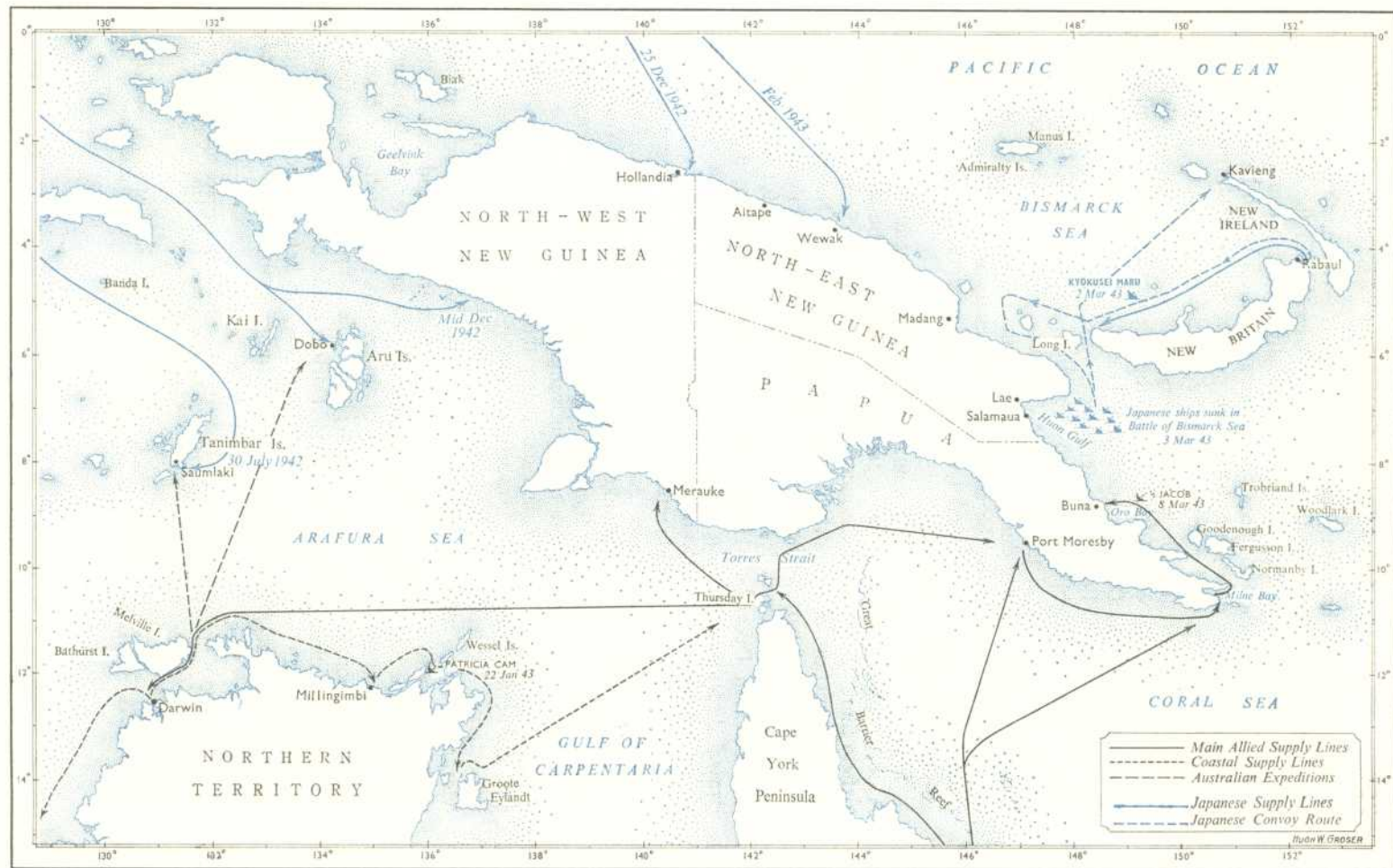
<sup>6</sup> HMAS *Reserve*, fleet tug (1943), 763 tons, one 3-in AA gun, 14 kts.

This was the last attack by a Japanese submarine on the east coast of Australia. During the searches on the 18th aircraft attacked a submarine off Coff's Harbour, and H.M.A.S. *Geelong* (Lieut-Commander C. G. Hill) attacked a possible submarine contact 40 miles N by E of Cape Moreton. But thereafter there was no real evidence of Japanese submarines operating in these waters. Over the period of a little more than twelve months when they did operate there, the Japanese disposed at intervals a total of 12 individual boats on the Australian east coast. They sank between them 18 ships of an aggregate of 79,608 gross tons. Fatal casualties in these sinkings were 465. In addition, a Japanese submarine sank the 300-ton *Mamutu* in northern Australian waters with the loss of 106 lives, and submarines attacked another 15 ships in Australian coastal waters without sinking them, though some were badly damaged; these attacks brought total fatal casualties from submarine attacks to 605, including the 19 ratings killed in *Kuttabal* in the Sydney Harbour raid.

## V

The continental east coast supply line, which the Japanese harassed with submarines in the first half of 1943, branched at the northern end of the Coral Sea to feed Milne Bay, Port Moresby, and, by a western branch through Torres Strait, Thursday Island, Darwin, and Merauke in Dutch New Guinea. At the end of 1942, with the start of LILLIPUT operation on 18th December, when *Lithgow* left Milne Bay escorting *Japara* to Oro Bay, a north-western branch stretched out round the north coast of New Guinea. Thus was instituted a regular supply and transport service between Milne and Oro Bays (six sailings in January and February were from Port Moresby) similar to that which in 1941 operated along the Egyptian and Libyan coasts from Alexandria and Mersa Matruh to Tobruk. The parallel was marked. As in the Mediterranean in 1941, the main problem on both sides was that of supply. The Allies in New Guinea, like the British in North Africa, were concerned with building up a coastal supply line and improvising ports along a route subject (in particular) to air attack. The problem of the Japanese, like that of the Germans and Italians in the Mediterranean, was one of trans-sea supply from bases in the north, the supply lines being subject (in particular) to air attack. A point of difference at this stage was in the small part played in the New Guinea operations by the submarine as a combat vessel. It was used as such to considerable extent and effect by both sides in the Mediterranean. At this stage in New Guinea, airborne bombs were the main weapons used by each side against the other's supply lines, both south and north of the island, and in attacks both on ports and on ships at sea.

When 1943 opened, only the "tail" of New Guinea as far north as Sanananda on the northern coast, the Bulolo goldfields area, western Papua, and the southern coast as far west as Merauke—which was initially occupied by the Americans in mid-1942 to provide an advanced airfield—were in Allied hands. The Japanese controlled the Solomon Sea, across



Allied and Enemy supply problems, New Guinea area, June 1942 to June 1943

which their main line ran from New Britain to the north-east coast of New Guinea through Lae and Madang to Wewak. To the west of New Guinea they had, throughout 1942, gradually established a hold on the eastern islands of the Indonesian Archipelago, and on Dutch New Guinea,<sup>7</sup> and this hold they now strengthened. In mid-December 1942 they landed about 270 officers and men at Kokenau on the south coast, 325 miles north-west of Merauke. On the 17th they landed at Cape Gloucester, on the western tip of New Britain, where they began preparing an airstrip. And on Christmas Day they occupied Hollandia on the north coast of Dutch New Guinea. Four days later the headquarters of *25th Naval Special Base Force* was established there to strengthen the defence of Dutch New Guinea and to control the area. The Japanese planned further advances in southern New Guinea during 1943 as a counter to the situation developing adversely to them in the south-east, especially in the Solomons. But these plans never got beyond land reconnaissance in the Kokenau area about the middle of the year.

They did, however—since some hint of these intentions reached the Allies—influence Allied plans regarding Merauke. To build the proposed airfield there, the garrison was increased by a detachment of army engineers, but construction of the airfield was suspended, and in November 1942 G.H.Q. directed partial withdrawal of the garrison. Meanwhile the Japanese occupation of Kokenau led to a reconsideration of plans for withdrawal, and on 27th December 1942, G.H.Q. ordered suspension of the withdrawal directive except for one company of engineers. It was decided to retain Merauke as an advanced naval small boat refuelling base, and on 31st December G.H.Q. directed its reinforcement by two companies of Australian infantry and one Australian Bren carrier platoon. Later, in April and May 1943, Merauke was further reinforced with Australian troops, and H.M.A. Ships *Warrego*, *Swan*, and *Latrobe*<sup>8</sup> were employed on escort work covering these troop movements.

Throughout the New Guinea campaign the heavy fighting was along the northern littoral, and the northern supply line assumed the greater importance. The southern branches, however—both to Darwin and to Merauke—came under frequent air attack, as did those lesser branches from Darwin to outlying stations, west to Exmouth Gulf and east to the Gulf of Carpentaria. Merauke experienced its first air raid on 22nd December 1942, and on the 26th and 27th of the month the Dutch *Van Heemskerck* was bombed there by a float-plane. The ship was hit, and three natives were killed and four wounded. Darwin came under fairly constant air attack, with some heavy raids,<sup>9</sup> and was, in return, the source of frequent air attacks by the R.A.A.F. on Timor, Ambon, and the Aru and

<sup>7</sup> By the agreement of the Japanese Army and Navy central authority regarding the defence of the Southern Strategic Area (13 January 1943) "the former Dutch New Guinea will be called the West New Guinea, and the former British New Guinea will be called East New Guinea"

<sup>8</sup> HMAS *Latrobe*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>9</sup> Raid No. 53 on 15th March was of 22 bombers and 24 fighters, and in May and June raids 54, 55, 56 and 57 were of 18, 15, 9 and 27 bombers respectively, all with fighter cover.



Tanimbar Islands, and of regular reconnaissance of Dutch New Guinea. Throughout there was a moderate and constant stream of surface traffic along the Australian north coast between Thursday Island and Darwin (the port handled 204,573 tons of cargo in the first quarter of the year), and regular sailings of small Darwin-based naval craft with people and supplies for outlying stations. Most of these latter were unescorted, but the through sailings between Darwin and Thursday Island were usually escorted by a corvette of the 24th Minesweeping Flotilla based on Darwin,<sup>1</sup> and were in addition given fighter cover. At this time ships in the vicinity of Cape Wessel occasionally suffered from the attentions of enemy float-planes which inflicted some losses. On 15th December 1942 *Castlemaine*, escorting the merchant ships *Period* and *James Cook* (2,181 tons) from Thursday Island to Darwin, was off Cape Wessel when, just before 1 p.m., one of these aircraft attacked the convoy and secured a direct hit on *Period*. Four members of her crew were killed and nine injured. The aircraft came in for a second attack on *Period* but was deflected by *Castlemaine*'s anti-aircraft fire, and dropped its bombs in the sea. It then flew off. Soon after, friendly fighters appeared. When they had gone the float-plane returned, but was repulsed by *Castlemaine* who, when it had gone, took *Period*'s wounded on board—the corvette siding on the merchant ship for this operation, while both ships maintained five knots. Next morning a float-plane again tried to attack *Period*, but was again driven off by *Castlemaine*, and the ships reached Darwin without further incident.

It was while engaged on an outlying station supply operation that the auxiliary minesweeper H.M.A.S. *Patricia Cam* was sunk by one of these float-planes, on 22nd January. *Patricia Cam*, a motor vessel of 301 tons, was based on Darwin (where she arrived on 5th April 1942) as a general-purpose vessel, used mainly for carrying stores to outlying stations on the north and west coasts of Australia. She left Darwin on such a mission on 13th January 1943, and on 22nd January sailed from Elcho Island Mission for Jensen's coastwatching station on Marchinbar Island. Her complement was two officers and 17 ratings, and she had as passengers five natives, and the Reverend L. N. Kentish, chairman of the Methodist Northern Australian Mission District. At 1.30 p.m. on 22nd January, when the ship was just to the west of the Wessel Islands, a Japanese float-plane dived from out the sun with engines cut off, passed over the ship from stern to stem at a height of about 150 feet, and dropped a bomb which landed amidships in the centre of the cargo hatch and blew a hole in the bottom planking. *Patricia Cam* sank in about one minute. One of the crew, Ordinary Seaman Penglase,<sup>2</sup> went down with the ship. The survivors got away on the only remaining raft, and on wreckage. The aircraft then returned and dropped a second bomb which killed Able Seaman Nobes<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ships of the 24th MS Flotilla based on Darwin during the first half of 1943 were HMA Ships *Latrobe*, *Inverell*, *Castlemaine* and *Wilcannia*. *Kalgoorlie* was there up to 23rd February 1943.

<sup>2</sup> OD N. G. Penglase, PA2516. HMAS *Patricia Cam*. B. Adelaide, 4 Sep 1922. Lost in sinking of *Patricia Cam*, 22 Jan 1943.

<sup>3</sup> AB E. D. Nobes, PA2319. HMAS *Patricia Cam*. B. Southwark, SA, 6 Dec 1922. Killed in action 22 Jan 1943.

and two natives, and fatally injured Stoker Cameron<sup>4</sup> and a third native. The aircraft circled the area for half an hour, machine-gunned survivors (ineffectually) and then alighted on the water near to Mr Kentish, who was ordered by the pilot to swim across. He was questioned, and taken on board the aircraft, which took off and was not seen again. It was subsequently learned that the missionary was executed by the Japanese at Dobo, in the Aru Islands, on 5th February.

The remaining survivors drifted southwards in a strong current, and finally a landing was made on a small islet at 3.30 a.m. on Saturday, 23rd January. All but two—E.R.A. Moffitt,<sup>5</sup> and Ordinary Seaman Johnston<sup>6</sup> who were last seen at dusk on the 22nd clinging to some wreckage—got safely ashore. Here Cameron and the third native died. The survivors had no food other than oysters and some edible roots shown to them by the two native survivors, and on Monday morning, the 25th, Lieutenant Meldrum<sup>7</sup> set off with some natives by canoe for Marchinbar where, after walking 25 miles barefooted, he reached Jensen's coastwatching station at 9 p.m. on the 26th. Jensen sent natives with food, first-aid kit and other items to the island, and a message was teleradioed to Darwin next morning. *Kuru* rescued the survivors at 8 p.m. on the 29th, and landed them at Darwin at 10 a.m. on 1st February.

There were similar incidents at other times. During May, when *Latrobe* escorted s.s. *Islander* (1,598 tons) with R.A.A.F. stores and people to North Goulburn Island, Millingimbi, and the Wessel Islands, the two ships were attacked on a number of occasions by enemy aircraft; *Islander* sustained seven casualties (one fatal) and slight damage.

## VI

At the beginning of 1943 it was difficult to provide air cover for the northern New Guinea supply line, and to carry out air attacks against the enemy. The inability adequately to safeguard Port Moresby, then the main air base in Papua, against air attack until radar and fighters could be based north of the Owen Stanley Range, made it unsuitable for the massing of large numbers of aircraft; nor could Milne Bay furnish adequate air cover for the ships. The situation waited upon the provision of air base facilities at Dobodura, and this provision depended upon the supply of materials, fuel, and bombs by sea to Oro Bay, and the building up there of an adequately equipped port. This last was a slow process, since the establishment of Dobodura was given priority. Reporting on an inspection of Oro Bay he carried out from 17th to 19th February, Captain R. C.

<sup>4</sup> Stoker P. J. Cameron, S6670. HMAS *Patricia Cam.* Of Sydney; b. Sydney, 5 Aug 1918. Died of wounds 23 Jan 1943.

<sup>5</sup> Chief ERA W. R. Moffitt, 24501; RAN. HMAS's *Vendetta*, *Voyager*, *Patricia Cam.* Fitter and turner; b. Lockhart, NSW, 23 Aug 1918. Lost in sinking of *Patricia Cam.*, 22 Jan 1943.

<sup>6</sup> OD A. A. Johnston, B3815; HMAS *Patricia Cam.* Of Malanda, Qld; b. Malanda, 3 Nov 1921. Lost in sinking of *Patricia Cam.*, 22 Jan 1943.

<sup>7</sup> Lt A. C. Meldrum, RANR. HMAS *Deloraine*; comd HMAS's *Wato* 1942 and *Patricia Cam* 1942-43; HMAS *Innisfail* 1943-44. Master mariner; of Rabaul and Sydney; b. Tumbaramba, NSW, 28 Sep 1901.

Garsia recorded that Colonel Collin S. Myers, commanding the American troops at Oro Bay, told him that "he had been starved for engineers' equipment by priority given to formation of road to Dobodura and new Dobodura aerodrome. Hence delays to development Oro Bay." At this time the one wharf was "still in pontoon stage". Petrol, in 50-gallon drums floating and "banging and bumping in the swell" was landed by the drums being hauled singly by can hooks up a wooden ramp by a wire and small motor. Cargo working was further retarded by air attack or raid warnings. "Several hours unloading time was lost from five 'red' warnings during my brief stay in Oro Bay." The Australian naval party at Oro Bay (now under the command of Lieutenant Adamson<sup>8</sup> as Beachmaster) lived, Garsia reported, "on the charity of a U.S.A. military mess. They have neither knife, spoon, fork, mug or plate. They have nothing. . . . The position is one that will bring the naval service into disrepute with the United States Army, the Australian Army, and also the United States Navy if they witness it."

Rear-Admiral Muirhead-Gould, who toured the area a few days later, confirmed this "disconcerting report"—as it was described by Admiral Royle in a signal asking him to investigate the position—and Hunt, at Port Moresby, also told the Naval Board that he had read Garsia's description "with which I concur generally. This area is, however, entirely run by United States authorities and road conditions and harbour works are being rapidly improved." Commander Webb,<sup>9</sup> who assumed the appointment of N.O.I.C. Oro Bay on 15th March, found conditions there much the same as experienced by Muirhead-Gould and Garsia. In a preliminary report he wrote a description of naval life there. He left Milne Bay for Oro Bay on 13th March in the motor vessel *Comara* (751 tons) which

was loaded to her marks and there was not a square foot of deck space, hatches were covered with trucks and vehicles of all descriptions and with ship's company and troops there was twice the number of men on board for whom there was lifeboat accommodation, etc.

Of Oro Bay, where *Comara* arrived early on Monday, 15th March, "Webby"—as he was widely known in maritime circles—recorded:

The place itself, especially around the waterfront, is pretty awful. . . . A dark hut is our dining room and a rough table and old cases make up the furniture and the food consists of bully beef, tinned sausages, tinned vegetables, etc. etc., never hot and practically the same for every meal, and washed down with a mixture that is either tea or coffee or both. . . . Outside each tent we have a hole boarded and bagged for the officer to hop into in case of need. . . . Alerts are numerous but seem to be mostly false alarms caused by our own planes, and when they happen we don tin hats, mackintosh groundsheets, and stand by to go to ground.

<sup>8</sup> Lt C. T. J. Adamson, RANVR. Beachmaster, Oro Bay and Buna 1943; comd HMAS *Stella* 1943-44. Asst Resident Magistrate; of Papua; b. London, 17 Jan 1901.

<sup>9</sup> Cdr C. J. R. Webb, RD; RANR. (1915-18: HMAS *Huon*.) B. Yorkshire, England, 6 Dec 1885. After the first world war he was with the Commonwealth Government Steamship Line and was for some years Harbour Master at Rabaul, where he was instrumental in establishing the coast-watching service in the Bismarck Archipelago. He was Commodore of Convoys (Sydney) until his appointment to Oro Bay.

Commenting on this report, Hunt, in Port Moresby, remarks:

Victualling arrangements are in the hands of the Naval Officer in Charge, Oro Bay, the personnel being at present victualled from the Australian Army in a similar manner to the whole of the Military Forces in this area, which system it is not proposed to alter at present. . . . Even under the circumstances existing prior to Commander Webb's arrival, the naval personnel at Oro Bay were, according to reports, existing under more congenial circumstances than the Military personnel around them.

Only a few weeks earlier, Port Moresby naval personnel had been similarly victualled from the Australian Army. On 1st January 1943 the naval establishment there was commissioned as H.M.A.S. *Basilisk* under Hunt's command. During January the naval Director of Victualling, Mr Claude Massey,<sup>1</sup> spent some days in Port Moresby on a tour of inspection of the area and discussions with New Guinea Force concerning victualling and supplies, and on 1st February Hunt recorded in the Port Moresby Letter of Proceedings:

Naval victualling for HMAS *Basilisk* was resumed this day, the personnel of the Base having been fed by army rations for approximately 11 months. A marked improvement in the quality and quantity of food supplied was evident.

In his comments on Webb's report, Hunt remarked on the problem of providing air cover for ships on the Milne Bay-Oro Bay run:

Air cover is arranged by me in conjunction with Fifth Air Force and Naval Officer in Charge, Milne Bay. Air cover is provided for escorted ships only as not sufficient aircraft are available to cover *all* ships on passage. To date, it has not been possible to provide continuous air cover by fighters in the Cape Nelson area owing to climatic conditions and the distance from their bases; with the completion recently [this was written on 29th March 1943] of the Horanda strip at Dobodura, however, more efficient fighter protection should be able to be given for ships in the Buna area, but it will never be possible to provide air cover for all ships while on passage.

An instance of the air attack hazard in the Cape Nelson area was given on 2nd January 1943, when *Whyalla* was at anchor in MacLaren Harbour and *Stella* and *Polaris* were under way at the entrance, all on survey work. At 1.50 p.m. they were attacked by six dive bombers escorted by 12 fighters. The enemy scored nothing closer than near misses. Two of *Whyalla's* ratings were wounded by splinters. Only slight blast damage was done to the ships.

By this time the LILLIPUT operation was well under way. As in the "Tobruk Ferry Service" the escorting ships were Australian—corvettes in this instance instead of destroyers—and they were commanded and manned almost wholly by Reserve officers and men. Almost without exception the merchant ships of LILLIPUT were Dutch. Not until the final stage, in June 1943, did the first American Liberty ship, *Key Pittman* (7,181 tons) enter Oro Bay. In the opening stages of the operation during December 1942 and January and February 1943, 12 Dutch ships and eight

<sup>1</sup> C. Massey. Director of Victualling, RAN; Deputy Controller-General of Food 1943-46; Aust Minister to Egypt 1949-53. B. Footscray, Vic, 31 Oct 1889.

corvettes took part. A total of 40,000 tons of supplies was transported, and 2,400 troops were carried in 18 individual voyages. Over the whole 40 stages, from mid-December 1942 to mid-June 1943, 39 separate voyages were made (one was cancelled owing to the loss of its merchant ship, *Van Heemskerk*, in an air attack on Milne Bay), and 15 R.A.N. corvettes and two American submarine chasers participated, escorting 24 merchant ships which transported a total of 60,000 tons of supplies and 3,802 troops.<sup>2</sup>

LILLIPUT was not carried through without loss. Two merchant ships were sunk and two badly damaged; and the corvettes sustained damage and casualties. On 9th January *Van Heutsz* was discharging in Oro Bay while her escort, *Katoomba*, maintained anti-submarine patrol outside. At 2 p.m. six Japanese dive bombers raided the bay and scored a direct hit and two near misses on *Van Heutsz*. *Katoomba* was machine-gunned, and some of her standing rigging was shot through. Neither ship was immobilised, and, in each, casualties were limited to two slightly wounded. The attack lasted about five minutes and terminated with the arrival of Allied fighters.

On 8th March *Bendigo*, escorting 's *Jacob* to Oro Bay, passed *Kapunda*<sup>3</sup> (Lieut-Commander Dixon<sup>4</sup>) off Cape Nelson escorting *Karsik* to Milne Bay. At 1 p.m. nine Japanese bombers escorted by 12 fighters (which a few minutes later raided Oro Bay) attacked 's *Jacob*. Bombs landed on and around the ship, and she caught fire and sank at 1.16 p.m. off Porlock Harbour. Meanwhile another flight of enemy bombers unsuccessfully attacked *Kapunda* and *Karsik*. Allied fighters arrived five minutes after 's *Jacob* sank, and both enemy flights made off. Of the 16 Allied fighters which intercepted, three made contact with the enemy and destroyed one bomber and one fighter. Five of 's *Jacob*'s company lost their lives. The 153 survivors were picked up by *Bendigo*. Of these, two, Captain Stokes,<sup>5</sup> A.I.F., and an American Army private died on the passage back to Milne Bay.

On this occasion *Kapunda* and *Karsik* were returning from Oro Bay to Milne Bay after successfully completing the first stage of another operation—ACCOUNTANT—carried out simultaneously with LILLIPUT. Its object was the transfer of the 162nd Regiment of the 41st U.S. Division from Australia to the Buna-Gona area. Four corvettes, *Ballarat*, *Bendigo*, *Echuca*<sup>6</sup> and *Kapunda*, and three Dutch ships, *Bontekoe*, *Karsik* and *Van Heemskerk*, took part in the New Guinea section of the operation, and

<sup>2</sup> The ships which took part in LILLIPUT were: R.A.N. corvettes—*Ballarat*, *Bendigo*, *Bowen*, *Broome*, *Bunbury*, *Colac*, *Echuca*, *Glenelg*, *Gympie*, *Kapunda*, *Katoomba*, *Latrobe*, *Lithgow*, *Pirie*, *Wagga*; American submarine chasers SC746 and SC750; merchant ships—*Anhui*, *Balikpapan*, *Bantam*, *Bontekoe*, *Both*, *Hanyang*, *Janssens*, *Japara*, *Karsik*, *Key Pittman*, *Lorinna*, *Maatsuyker*, *Patras*, *Reijnt*, 's *Jacob*, *Swartenhondt*, *Tasman*, *Thedens*, *Van den Bosch*, *Van Heutsz*, *Van Outhoorn*, *Van Spilbergen*, *Van Swoll*, *Yochow*.

<sup>3</sup> HMAS *Kapunda*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Cdr J. H. P. Dixon, VRD; RANR. Comd HMAS's *Tambar* 1941-42, *Kapunda* 1943-44, *Gawler* 1944-45. Barrister-at-law; of New Norfolk, Tas; b. York, England, 19 Mar 1911.

<sup>5</sup> Capt W. R. G. Stokes; 101 Ordnance Fwd Depot. Accountant; of Henley Beach, SA; b. Wilston, Qld, 13 Aug 1910. Died of wounds, 8 Mar 1943.

<sup>6</sup> HMAS *Echuca*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

between 21st February and 4th March, in five stages, carried from Port Moresby or Milne Bay about 3,200 troops to Oro Bay.

## VII

Meanwhile the Japanese were meeting serious difficulties in the reinforcement and supply of their forces in New Guinea. From the west their task was less formidable, since they had only submarines to contend with, and in the last week in February they successfully ran a convoy of 11 ships, escorted by two cruisers and 10 destroyers, from Palau to Wewak. Four American submarines were encountered, two outside Palau, and one each to the north of Hollandia and Wewak respectively, but no damage was suffered by any ship. Transportation south-eastward from Wewak was, however, more hazardous. Roads connecting Wewak with Madang and Lae were lacking, and pending their construction it was essential swiftly to reinforce the last-named area to counter the Allied progress from the south-eastward and threat from Wau. From the north-westward the only way for such reinforcement would be by sea to Finschhafen and thence by forced march overland. Accordingly—though probable losses at sea in the operation were estimated at about 50 per cent—it was planned to send a convoy to Lae from Rabaul.

At midnight on 28th February 1943, a convoy of eight ships<sup>7</sup> carrying between six and seven thousand men comprising troops of the *115th Regiment* and *14th Field Artillery* of the *51st Division*, and 400 marines, and escorted by eight destroyers<sup>8</sup> under the command of Rear-Admiral Kimura in *Shirayuki*, left Rabaul and set course westward at seven knots on the first leg of a disastrous voyage. The route was to be along the north coast of New Britain to Cape Gloucester, thence W. by N. to a point north-east of Long Island, thence S. by E. through Vitiaz Strait and into Huon Gulf.

The voyage started off under a rain-misted sky and veiled horizon which promised security from observation, but at 4 p.m. on 1st March, when the convoy was 45 miles W.S.W. of Cape Lambert, New Britain, it was sighted through the cloud cover by an American Liberator aircraft, and the alarm was given. The quarry was shadowed until 9.30 p.m. when contact was lost, but it was found again at 8.15 a.m. on the 2nd, and a force of 12 Flying Fortresses and 17 other heavy bombers was sent in to attack, which they did around 10 a.m. *Kyokusei Maru* was the victim, and before noon was on the bottom. Ironically the survivors of the first ship sunk—some 850—were the only ones in the convoy to be taken by ships thereof to their destination. They were picked up by destroyers *Asagumo* and *Yukikaze*<sup>9</sup> (which already had on board General Nakano with the *51st Division* staff) and landed at Lae at midnight on 2nd March.

<sup>7</sup> *Nojima* (7,189 tons); *Aryo Maru* (2,746 tons); *Kembu Maru* (953 tons); *Kyokusei Maru* (5,493 tons); *Oigawa Maru* (6,493 tons); *Shinai Maru* (3,793 tons); *Taimai Maru* (2,883 tons); *Teiyo Maru* (6,869 tons).

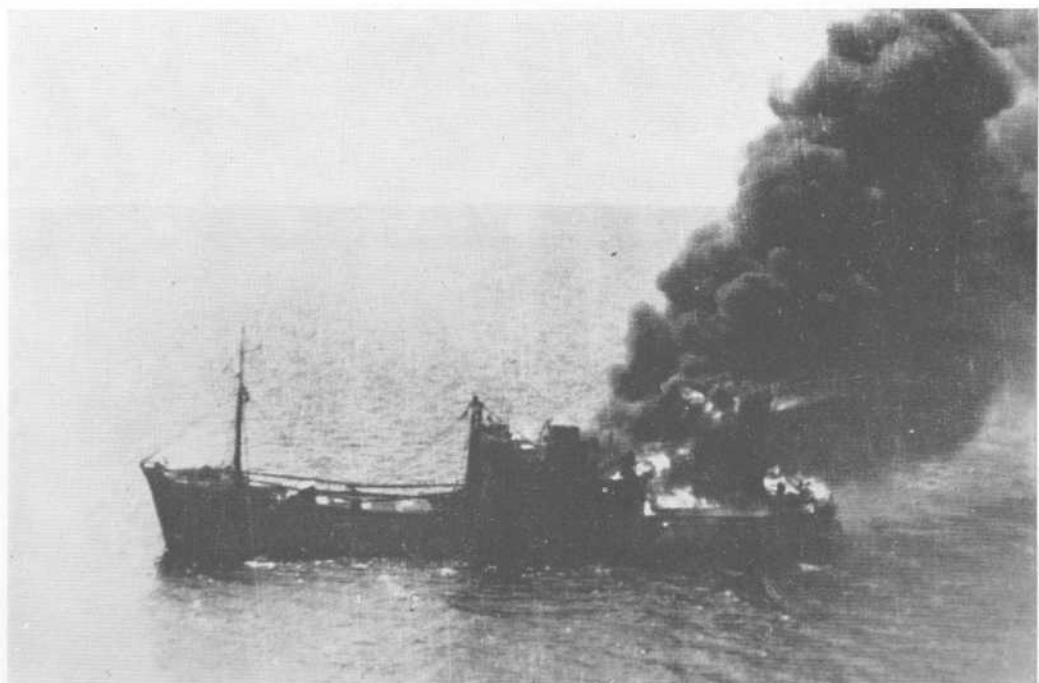
<sup>8</sup> *Shirayuki*, *Arashio*, *Asashio*, *Tokitsukaze*, *Yukikaze*, *Uranami*, *Shikinami*, *Asagumo*.

<sup>9</sup> *Yukikaze*, Japanese destroyer (1940), 2,000 tons, six 5-in guns, eight 24-in torpedo tubes, 36 kts.



*(R.A.N. Historical Section)*

Lieutenant W. J. (Jack) Read, R.A.N.V.R. (*left*) and Lieutenant P. E. Mason, R.A.N.V.R., coastwatchers on Bougainville.



*(R.A.N. Historical Section)*

A Japanese vessel under air attack in the Bismarck Sea Battle, 3rd March 1943.



H.M.A.S. *Bendigo* (out of picture) rescuing survivors of 's *Jacob*, 8th March 1943.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



During the 2nd the remaining 13 ships of the convoy pushed on westward, and in the evening, after circling to the north-east of Long Island and surviving an attack by eight Flying Fortresses, made southward between that island and Umboi into Vitiaz Strait. Throughout the night an Australian Catalina aircraft kept in touch and made its presence known by dropping an occasional disturbing bomb. Around 9 a.m. the convoy—by now numbering 15 ships with the return from Lae of *Asagumo* and *Yukikaze*—was about 30 miles south-east of Cape Cretin, and course was altered due west into Huon Gulf, with Lae only 90 miles distant. High overhead circled an air cover of some 40 Zero fighters.

But now disaster struck. As the ships, wide sprawled in loose formation, steamed over a smooth sea in tropical sunshine

about 30 B-17s [Flying Fortresses], 30 B-25s [Mitchell medium bombers] came from the south. They were closely followed by about 20 A-20s [Boston light bombers] at low level, about 20 unidentified aircraft [they were Australian Beaufighters of the R.A.A.F.] and 30/40 fighters at high level.<sup>1</sup>

This force made the first large-scale use of a newly developed attack technique. The Mitchell bombers were re-armed with the installation of eight .5-inch calibre machine-guns in the nose for “anti-personnel” fire; and the recently perfected “skip bombing” was used against the ships. This entailed the use of 500-lb bombs armed with a five-second delay fuse, enabling an aircraft to sweep in at masthead level and drop its bombs close alongside the ship attacked. The short delay allowed the aircraft to get clear before the explosion which, in the water close alongside the target, had an effect on the ship similar to that she would have suffered by striking a mine. Lieut-Commander Handa, who was a staff officer, *3rd Destroyer Squadron* in *Shirayuki*, recorded the events of the 15 minutes which succeeded the opening of the attack. (Japanese versions of the story show a time discrepancy of between one and two hours as against Allied accounts, presumably the difference between Japanese standard time and Australian. In the following description, Handa’s times are used.)

3/3/43—0700 hours. Changed course to 270 degrees towards Lae. 0805-0815 hours. Attacked. All seven transports damaged. One or two blew up and sank. Others sank after being set on fire. Flagship *Shirayuki* attacked in waves of three planes which came in at extremely low altitude almost in line with fore and aft line, ten degrees off starboard, in strafing and bombing attacks. Most of personnel on bridge killed or wounded. Bomb hit on after turret No. 2. Fire started, powder magazine exploded, stern section broke off. Ship flooded and sank.

The wounded Kimura, and the other survivors from *Shirayuki*, were taken on board *Shikinami*. In the first fifteen minutes of the attack the seven remaining transports were sunk or crippled. One of them, *Nojima*, met her fate in collision with destroyer *Arashio*, which ran amok when hit by a bomb but remained afloat. *Tokitsukaze* was also hit in this opening attack (in which the Japanese fighter cover was too high to give much protection)

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<sup>1</sup> From postwar interrogation of Japanese officers. “Greater East Asia War Summary.”

and was immobilized. Her company were taken off by *Yukikaze*, and she subsequently sank.

In *Shikinami*, Kimura decided temporarily to withdraw his remaining destroyers, all of which were damaged, after they had rescued survivors from sunken ships, and, excepting *Asashio*, which remained taking off the crew of *Arashio*, they retired northward through Dampier Strait to the vicinity of Long Island. Early in the afternoon a wireless message from *Asashio* told of her being attacked by 30 aircraft. Thereafter was silence. In the vicinity of Long Island Kimura's four destroyers were joined by destroyer *Hatsuyuki* from Kavieng. She refuelled them, and then she and one of the four, *Uranami*, embarked from the others the rescued they had picked up—a total of some 1,400—and took them to Rabaul. The three remaining ships, *Shikinami*, *Yukikaze*, and *Asagumo*, then returned southward to the battle area and carried out rescue work on a sea “covered with life rafts, rubber boats and swimmers”.<sup>2</sup> They desisted from this around midnight, and again retired to the north on their way to Kavieng, where they arrived on the evening of 4th March. The next morning they were back at Rabaul, sole survivors—with *Uranami*—of the 16 ships which had sailed thence little more than four days earlier. During the night of the 3rd-4th, as Kimura's survivors sped northward and westward to Kavieng, eight American P.T. boats ranged the battle area in Huon Gulf. Two of them found the burning, derelict *Oigawa Maru* and sent her down with torpedoes. During 4th March, Fifth Air Force bombers sank the only ships remaining there afloat, the crippled *Arashio* and a sister destroyer.

There remained survivors swimming, clinging to wreckage. Some were killed, by aircraft or P.T. boat attack. Some got ashore, on New Guinea and on islands in the D'Entrecasteaux and Trobriand groups, where they were killed or captured. Some were rescued between 4th and 8th March by submarines *I17* and *I26*. Of the total of approximately 8,000 men in the transports sunk, including troops carried and ships' crews, some 2,890 (2,300 soldiers, 150 marines and 440 ships' crews) went down with the ships; 3,800 were rescued by destroyers and 275 by the submarines; and 850 were landed at Lae by *Asagumo* and *Yukikaze*.

It was a crushing blow, and one which wrote finis to the Japanese aim to maintain firm control of Dampier Strait, and brought home to them the impossibility of reinforcing by means of surface transport if lacking strong air support. The loss of *Kembu Maru*, which was laden with aviation spirit, denied realisation of a plan to send air strength for “lively operations in the Lae-Salamaua area”. It now became necessary for them to rely on submarines and a “chain-transport” method to supply the Lae area, using small craft which moved only at night, and lay concealed during the day at coastal “relay bases”. The Bismarck Sea Battle also made clear to the Japanese that the threat to Rabaul, their central operational

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<sup>2</sup> S. E. Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier* (1950), p. 60, Vol VI in the series.

base, did not lie solely—as they had hitherto premised—in the Solomons area, but lay also in New Guinea. They were thus forced to split their already weak force to cope with this growing situation. One outcome of this was the sending to Rabaul of some 400 carrier-based aircraft which had been held in reserve, and with which it was now planned to carry out heavy attacks on New Guinea in April.<sup>3</sup>

### VIII

Meanwhile, in the southern Solomons, events shaped equally unsatisfactorily for the Japanese. The result of the naval battle of Guadalcanal in November 1942 convinced their navy that Guadalcanal should be abandoned to the enemy. The attrition of men, aircraft, and ships, especially destroyers, in continued Japanese attempts to reinforce and supply the island throughout December, finally converted the Prime Minister, General Tojo, to unwilling recognition that the navy was right, and that the Japanese could not take the island. Accordingly, on 4th January 1943, Tokyo ordered that Japanese forces must be withdrawn within a month. There were fierce air and surface actions in the area of "The Slot"—in which the American P.T. boats were a major menace to the Japanese—before withdrawal was finally effected, and not only the Japanese Navy suffered losses. On the morning of 5th January H.M.N.Z. Ship *Achilles*, one of an Allied force of cruisers and destroyers that had just carried out a night bombardment of a newly constructed Japanese airfield at Munda, on New Georgia, suffered a bomb hit which wrecked X turret, killed 13 and wounded eight of her company. Some three weeks later, on the night of 29th January, the New Zealand corvettes *Kiwi* and *Moa*<sup>4</sup> avenged that blow when they sank the submarine *I I*<sup>5</sup>, loaded with troops and supplies for Guadalcanal, near Kamimbo Bay on the north-west tip of the island.

While the two New Zealand ships were thus engaged, Guadalcanal took its last toll of American cruisers when *Chicago*, which was *Canberra*'s companion in the opening battle of Savo Island on 9th August 1942, suffered a fatal blow in the Battle of Rennell Island. She was one of a cruiser and destroyer group covering an American reinforcement convoy making for Guadalcanal from the southward, and at 7.45 p.m. on 29th January received a torpedo hit in an attack by enemy torpedo bombers. The crippled ship was taken in tow for Espiritu Santo, but in the afternoon of 30th January she was hit by four torpedoes in another air attack, and sank in 2,000 fathoms east of Rennell Island.

On the night of 1st-2nd February the Japanese carried out the first of three withdrawal operations. Twenty destroyers raced down "The Slot",

<sup>3</sup> Most of the foregoing concerning Japanese reactions to the Bismarck Sea Battle is from information supplied by Captain Ohmae, IJN, to US Naval Intelligence after the war.

<sup>4</sup> HMNZS's *Kiwi* and *Moa* (1941), corvettes, 600 tons, one 4-in gun, 13 kts. *Moa* sunk by air attack, Tulagi, 7 Apr 1943.

<sup>5</sup> *I I*, Japanese submarine (1926), 1,995 tons, two 4.7-in guns, 24 kts. Sunk off Guadalcanal, 29 Jan 1943.

and in spite of fierce opposition by American destroyers, P.T. boats and aircraft (it was thought that the Japanese were attempting a reinforcement, not a withdrawal) succeeded in their mission, with the loss of one destroyer which struck a mine. The second and third Japanese operations, on 4th and 7th February, were also successful. In the three operations the Japanese withdrew 11,706 men—many of whom were in very bad shape. The battle for Guadalcanal was over. At 4.25 p.m. on 9th February, American land forces converging from the east and west, met in a village on the Tenamba River, by Cape Esperance, and General Patch signalled to Admiral Halsey: "Total and complete defeat of Japanese forces on Guadalcanal effected 1625 today . . . 'Tokyo Express' no longer has terminus on Guadalcanal." And on the 25th of the month, with Guadalcanal safely and firmly held, extracts from personal letters sent to Lieutenant-Commander Mackenzie, R.A.N., at the coastwatcher headquarters on the island, were signalled to those men who, behind the Japanese lines, had done so much in the shaping of events:

From Admiral Turner, Commanding Amphibious Forces—"Large share credit our successes against enemy due splendid men in coast watcher service."

From General Patch, Commanding General at Guadalcanal—"Your magnificent and courageous work has contributed in great measure to success of operations on Guadalcanal."

In the sea struggle for the island, Allies and Japanese each lost 24 combat ships. They were: battleships, Allies nil, Japanese 2; aircraft carriers, Allies 2, Japanese nil; light carriers, Allies nil, Japanese 1; heavy cruisers, Allies 6, Japanese 3; light cruisers, Allies 2, Japanese 1; destroyers, Allies 14, Japanese 11; submarines, Allies nil, Japanese 6.<sup>6</sup>

On both sides the cost in lives was heavy. In both men and material, Australia paid her share.

## IX

At a meeting of the Advisory War Council in Canberra on 2nd February 1943, the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Guy Royle, said that in the Pacific "from a naval point of view the position was very satisfactory". The meeting was discussing the Casablanca Conference which was held in the French Moroccan seaport from 14th to 24th January. Attended by Mr Churchill, President Roosevelt, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Planners, the Conference confirmed the "Beat Germany First" strategy decided by the British and American leaders in January 1942, and drew up plans for the immediate and near-future conduct of the war. It was agreed that the security of sea communications constituted the first charge on Allied resources; that the immediate target after the final defeat of the enemy in North Africa should be Sicily; and that, subject to the prior need to capture Sicily, strong American forces were to be assembled in

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<sup>6</sup> Two sources contributed towards the information in the above brief section on Guadalcanal: Morison, Vol V, pp. 316-373, and Feldt, p. 256.

Britain in anticipation of a cross-Channel invasion of France. Simultaneously with the Allied offensive in the Mediterranean, the heaviest possible air attacks were to be maintained on Germany from Britain by night and day. In the war against Japan, pressure would be applied in a British autumn campaign to recapture Burma. And in the Pacific, operations for the capture of Rabaul and the clearing of the enemy from New Guinea would continue; and if resources permitted, American operations against the Marshall and Caroline Islands would be implemented.

The Advisory War Council discussed cabled summaries of the conference decisions at the meeting on 2nd February and decided that they should be viewed as laying down a program for 1943, and accepted as a pro tem policy. It was felt that it would be unprofitable to challenge the decisions, but that it should be emphasised to Churchill and Roosevelt that even a holding war in the Pacific required certain things and that a statement of requirements should be furnished to them. Royle expressed the view that the strategy laid down at Casablanca would not affect the provision of naval forces in the Pacific. By the middle of June 1943 there would be a powerful American fleet in the Pacific:

Three new first class aircraft carriers will be in commission within the next three months, while six to eight second class carriers are already in commission. The United States are also bringing a large number of new ships into the Pacific.

("Spring of 1943," recorded the American naval historian, "found United States naval strength in the South Pacific greater than ever before, except in fast carriers." Six task forces supported the Guadalcanal line: two were built around carriers *Saratoga* and *Enterprise* respectively; one of four new battleships had *Washington* as flagship; another was of Pearl Harbour survivors *Maryland* and *Colorado*, with three escort carriers; and two were each of cruiser-destroyer composition.<sup>7</sup>)

From the decisions reached at the Casablanca Conference with regard to Allied operations in the Pacific came the "Elkton" series of plans, the third of which was put into operation in June 1943. They derived from the Joint Chiefs of Staff directive for Guadalcanal, New Britain, New Ireland and New Guinea operations of 2nd July 1942. In this directive Task I was the conquest and garrisoning of the Santa Cruz Islands, Tulagi and adjacent positions; Task II entailed taking and retaining the remainder of the Solomons, Lae, Salamaua, and the north-eastern coast of New Guinea; and Task III was the seizure and occupation of Rabaul and adjacent positions in New Ireland-New Britain areas. The first Elkton Plan, of 12th February 1943, visualised broadly the same objectives, to be realised by a mutually supporting advance of Soupac and Souwespac forces through the Solomon Islands to Kavieng, and along the north-east coast of New Guinea to Wewak and the Admiralty Islands as a preliminary to a combined assault on Rabaul. Rabaul would become the main

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<sup>7</sup> Morison, Vol VI, p. 106.

base for the staging of operations westwards along the New Guinea coast, and thence north to the Philippine Islands.

This plan was superseded by the second Elktion Plan dated 11th March, and prepared by MacArthur's headquarters for the consideration of a Pacific military conference held at Washington between 12th and 18th March, and attended by representatives of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Cenpac, Soupac, Souwespac, and the American War and Navy Departments. The second plan stated that Task I of the July 1942 directive could be considered accomplished. In discussing Tasks II and III it closely followed the first Elktion Plan but analysed requirements and operations in more detail. It was discussed at the conference, at which Admiral King gave a broad outline of the global strategy approved at Casablanca, and said that he anticipated that projected Mediterranean operations might delay reinforcement of the Pacific areas, but that "further developments in the Pacific areas might enable additional operations to be undertaken. For instance, Allied successes at Midway enabled the operations in the Solomon Islands area to be undertaken in August 1942 instead of the planned initial target date of November 1942."<sup>8</sup> The discussions at subsequent meetings of the conference hinged almost entirely on the question of forces which could be made available. Sufficient were not in sight to carry out the second Elktion Plan in its entirety. However, General Sutherland and Admiral Spruance—representing Souwespac and Soupac respectively—gave it as their opinion that the combined forces could, during 1943, execute Task II of the July 1942 directive to include Madang, the south-east portion of Bougainville, and to extend to Cape Gloucester, and Kiriwina and Woodlark Islands. The third Elktion Plan, dated 26th April 1943, was therefore prepared by Souwespac headquarters in accordance with a Joint Chiefs of Staff directive of 20th March outlining the offensive operations necessary in 1943 in the Souwespac and Soupac areas, under the over-all World Sextant Plan. The new directive nominated as objectives:

- (a) Establish airfields on Kiriwina and Woodlark Islands.
- (b) Seize Lae-Salamaua-Finschhafen-Madang area, and occupy western New Britain.
- (c) Seize and occupy Solomon Islands to include the southern portion of Bougainville.

The directive laid down that strategic command should be vested in MacArthur, but that operations in the Solomons would be under Halsey's direct command, he operating under MacArthur's general directives. Naval units of Pacific Ocean areas remained under Nimitz unless assigned by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to task forces engaged in the above operations. MacArthur was directed to submit general plans to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

By this time there had been a reconstitution of the naval forces in the Pacific, involving the Australian Squadron, Task Force 44. On 15th

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<sup>8</sup> Minutes of Pacific Military Conference, Washington, 12th-20th March 1943.

March Admiral King instituted a new numbered fleet system by which all fleets in the Pacific were odd-numbered, all in the Atlantic were even-numbered. Those concerned in the proposed operations were: Third Fleet (former South Pacific Force), Admiral Halsey, and III Amphibious Force, Rear-Admiral Turner; Fifth Fleet (former Central Pacific Force), Vice-Admiral Spruance; and Seventh Fleet (former Naval Forces South-West Pacific), Vice-Admiral Carpenter, with VII Amphibious Force, Rear-Admiral Barbey. Each fleet was divided into task forces of which the first digit was the number of the fleet. Thus the Australian Task Force 44 now became Task Force 74.<sup>9</sup>

On receipt of the Joint Chiefs' directive, MacArthur and Halsey conferred in Brisbane and agreed on combined plans for the invasions of New Georgia and the Trobriand Islands in mid-May, but these operations were put off by delays in building up VII Amphibious Force.

In Australia, combined operational training of naval officers and men in preparation for offensive operations in the South-West Pacific Area started at Toorbul in August 1942. On 1st September H.M.A.S. *Assault* was commissioned in *Westralia*, which had reached Sydney on 5th August from escorting portion of "Schooner" convoy. She arrived at Port Stephens, New South Wales, on 3rd September and remained there as accommodation ship. On 30th September *Manoora* arrived at Sydney from escort work, and next day Admiral Royle recommended that she be reconverted for use as a cargo and troop carrier. (The British, he told the Council, had transferred 15 armed merchant cruisers back to trade.) The recommendation was adopted, and *Manoora* paid off and went into dockyard hands in Sydney.

The strategic concept of the campaign to drive the Japanese from their positions in the South-West Pacific was based on amphibious operations and, in the second half of 1942, an amphibious warfare section was organised in the American Navy Department by Rear-Admiral Barbey. At the end of the year this officer was appointed in command of VII Amphibious Force. This, when Barbey arrived in Australia, existed in little more than name. In December 1942 L.C.T's (Landing Craft, Tank) and smaller craft began to arrive.<sup>1</sup> But because of the pressing need for transports in other war theatres, none of these ships was immediately available for VII Amphibious Force. *Manoora*, which recommissioned as a Landing Ship, Infantry (L.S.I.) on 2nd February 1943, under the command of Captain Cousin, was the first such ship to join the force. In her conversion *Manoora* conformed to the British system of mess decks and hammocks for the troops on board. This limited her troop accommoda-

<sup>9</sup> With the formation of Seventh Fleet, the composition of South-West Pacific Naval Forces became: TF.70, motor torpedo boats; TF.71, submarines based on Fremantle; TF.72, submarines based on Brisbane; TF.73 HQ Naval Air (Brisbane); TF.74, cruisers and destroyers; TF.76, amphibious forces; TF.78, escort and mincraft. On 16th March the South-West Pacific Sea Frontier Command was established under operational control of CNS.

<sup>1</sup> They included, in addition to LCT's, LCM's (Landing Craft, Mechanised), and LCVP's (Landing Craft, Vehicles and Personnel) at this stage primarily for use in the training of the army, and these craft, as they arrived, were assigned to the Port Stephens training centre, and to another centre at Toorbul Point, about 50 miles north of Brisbane.

tion to about 850. On Barbey's representations the other former Australian A.M.C's—which were also put into dockyard hands for conversion in Sydney, *Westralia* in December 1942 and *Kanimbla* in April 1943—were converted on the American pattern with installed standee bunks and a cafeteria messing system, by which means troop capacity was increased to 1,250. *Manoora* was subsequently altered to bring her into line. The three ships carried American landing craft—20-22 L.C.V.P's and 2-3 L.C.M's. In March 1943 the American attack transport (A.P.A.) *Henry T. Allen* (12,400 tons) reported at Sydney to join the force, and in June U.S.S. *Rigel* joined and for the rest of the year was Barbey's flagship. Of the three Australian ships, *Manoora*, the only one to join the force during the first half of the year, spent most of the period exercising in Port Phillip Bay.

During these months of preparation for the offensive preliminary moves were made in both Soupac and Souwespac areas. Japanese airfields at Munda on New Georgia and Vila on Kolombangara were targets for American guns and bombs. Munda was a valuable Japanese staging point for aircraft from Rabaul or Bougainville attacking Tulagi and Guadalcanal. It was a target for continuous American air bombardments, but these could not put it out of action. "The Japanese ground crews, on the double, filled in the craters with crushed coral, and in a matter of minutes or hours the strip was again operational. Instead of rebuilding destroyed structures, the ground crews went underground."<sup>2</sup> In addition to the air bombardments, naval guns also paid their quota to the two airfields. Reference has been made to the American bombardment of Munda on 4th January. Three weeks later, on the night 23rd-24th January, a force of two cruisers and four destroyers heavily bombarded Vila airfield. But it was quickly operational again, and it became obvious that bombardment—whether air or surface—could not expunge these airfields. Only their capture would suffice. A step along the road thereto was made during the last week in February, when the Americans, in a series of unopposed landings, put 9,000 men, and equipment, on shore on the Russell Islands, and set to building a staging base and airfield.

A week before the landings American reconnaissance parties reconnoitred the islands. Their arrival was anticipated by that of two Australian coastwatchers, Lieutenant Campbell,<sup>3</sup> R.A.N.V.R. and Sub-Lieutenant Andresen,<sup>4</sup> R.A.N.V.R., who reported that the area was clear of Japanese. Some days later: "They [the Americans] arrived in the Russells, armed to the teeth, magazines charged and fingers on triggers, to be greeted by Campbell with the prosaic invitation to a cup of tea."<sup>5</sup>

The Japanese concurrently continued to expand their bases at Vila

<sup>2</sup> Morison, Vol VI, pp. 90-1.

<sup>3</sup> Lt A. Campbell, MC; RANVR. (1st AIF: 32 Bn.) Coastwatcher, AIB. Plantation supervisor; of Randwick, NSW; b. St Kilda, Vic, 20 Aug 1885. Died 5 Sep 1946.

<sup>4</sup> Sub-Lt A. M. Andresen, RANVR. Coastwatcher, AIB. Planter and trader; of Solomon Is; b. Balmain, NSW, 14 Nov 1895.

<sup>5</sup> Feldt, p. 248.



and Munda, the southern terminal of their new line of defence for the Bismarcks running thence to Salamaua. On the night of 5th-6th March four American destroyers bombarded Munda and three light cruisers and three destroyers hammered Vila airfield. The big dividend from the night's operations was the sinking in a brief gun action in Kula Gulf of the Japanese destroyers *Murasame* and *Minegumo* by Rear-Admiral A. S. Merrill's Vila bombardment group.

The help given to the Allies by the coastwatchers at this period was particularly valuable. By March 1943 their positions were close links in an Intelligence chain which threaded the Solomons from end to end. The establishment of enemy airfields near Buin on Bougainville, and of that at Munda, relieved the Japanese of the necessity to fly over Bougainville on bombing raids from Rabaul and Kavieng, so that Mason and Read on Bougainville were now to an extent out of the main operational picture. But other coastwatchers were well placed to watch Japanese movements against Guadalcanal initiated at Buin.

When aircraft left the area, they were reported by Choiseul or Vella Lavella, or both, Evans<sup>6</sup> then heard them from Kolombangara or Horton from Rendova, then Kennedy at Segi and finally Campbell at the Russells gave their position just before the radar picked them up. Sometimes every coastwatcher in the chain reported them. Similarly, ships and barges on the way down were reported. . . . It was "streamlined coastwatching", so rapid and sure that enemy attempts to prevent our forces being built up were quite ineffective; while the information supplied by coastwatchers, designating targets to be attacked, allowed our aircraft to harass the enemy so effectively that his bases could not be built up sufficiently to withstand attack.<sup>7</sup>

It was the coastwatchers who first gave warning of the opening air offensives of the Japanese "I" operation, which was carried out by 400 aircraft concentrated at Rabaul. Admiral Yamamoto himself took charge of this operation, and established his headquarters at Rabaul. His directive from Tokyo was to concentrate his air power on Papua, but he undertook to split the operation into two phases, the first to be directed against the lower Solomons. For this, medium bombers and fighters were staged down from Rabaul to Buka, Kahili in southern Bougainville, and Ballale in the Shortlands. Bougainville coastwatchers gave warning of the first attack in "I" operation, when 67 dive bombers and 110 fighters from these fields attacked ships at Tulagi and Guadalcanal on 7th April, and sank an American destroyer and tanker, and the New Zealand corvette *Moa*. After this one attack on the Solomons, Yamamoto switched the main weight of "I" operation to New Guinea.

## X

Summarising the events of the first quarter of 1943 at Port Moresby, Commander Hunt, writing on 1st April, said: "Enemy activity was very slight, consisting only of a few individual night nuisance raids, which did

<sup>6</sup> Lt A. R. Evans, DSC; AIF and RANVR. 2/9 Fd Regt 1940-42; coastwatcher, AIB; *ML1327*. Shipping clerk; of Tulagi, Solomon Is; b. Sydney, 14 May 1905.

<sup>7</sup> Feldt, p. 255.

not cause any damage or casualties." The "I" operation was now about to shake that calm. The occasional attacks on LILLIPUT ships and their ports continued, and on Sunday morning, 28th March, the enemy staged an air raid by 18 bombers and 40 fighters on Oro Bay. *Bantam*, Stage 21 of LILLIPUT, which was discharging at the wharf, received three hits from dive bombers, which also scored a hit on the wharf. The Dutch ship was badly damaged, and had to be beached. H.M.A.S. *Bowen*<sup>8</sup> (Lieutenant Olsen<sup>9</sup>), *Bantam*'s escort, which was providing anti-submarine protection, was not attacked, but the American small ship *Masaya* (1,174 tons), a converted First World War class destroyer, was attacked and sunk five miles east of Oro Bay. Thirty-one Allied fighters intercepted and destroyed thirteen Japanese aircraft.

The first New Guinea attack of the "I" operation was on Sunday, 11th April 1943, when a force of approximately 22 bombers and 72 fighters struck at Oro Bay. At noon that day H.M.A.S. *Pirie* (Lieut-Commander Mills), escorting the British *Hanyang* from Milne Bay, was approaching the port and about 12 miles distant. Approximately 12 of the raiders attacked the two ships with bombs and bullets. A direct hit by dive bombers on *Hanyang* (Stage 26 of LILLIPUT) penetrated the upper deck and exploded in the bunkers, disabling the steering gear. *Pirie* suffered two near misses, and claimed one attacking aircraft victim to her gunfire, in one attack, and in a second attack received a direct hit which caused casualties and damage. The bomb (apparently delayed-action fuse) struck the bridge canopy, glanced off the steering position apron and hit and killed the gunnery officer, Lieutenant Ellershaw,<sup>1</sup> passed out through the fore side of the bridge, and finally exploded on the upper deck, where it killed six members of the forecastle 12-pounder gun crew,<sup>2</sup> and seriously wounded the gunlayer. The ship was then heavily bombarded with cannon fire which badly tore and penetrated the decking and wounded three ratings. Two members of *Hanyang*'s crew and one American soldier were killed, and two crew and one soldier wounded. The attack ended at 12.53, when both ships proceeded to Oro Bay. Allied aircraft claimed six of the attacking Japanese, with no loss to themselves. *Pirie* arrived back in Milne Bay en route to the mainland, at 10 p.m. on the 13th. *Hanyang*'s people carried out a fine job of temporary repairs, and the ship discharged her cargo before leaving under escort at 3 a.m. on the 18th for Townsville.

The day after the Oro Bay attack, Port Moresby experienced its 106th raid by Japanese aircraft. It was the largest yet made in the South-West Pacific, and the first daylight raid on the port since raid No. 84 of 22nd October 1942. Forty-three bombers and approximately 60 fighters crossed the Owen Stanleys and concentrated their attacks on the Port Moresby

<sup>8</sup> HMAS *Bowen*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>9</sup> Lt G. L. Olsen, RANR. HMAS *Manoora*; comd HMAS *Bowen* 1942-43. Mariner; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 5 Feb 1904.

<sup>1</sup> Lt J. W. Ellershaw, RANVR. HMAS *Pirie*. Accountant; of Grange, SA; b. Hyde Park, SA, 1 Feb 1910. Killed in action 11 Apr 1943.

<sup>2</sup> OD A. E. Catley, AB V. J. Cremer, AB F. G. Delaney, OD M. D. Gladman, AB J. I. Keeling, OD V. G. Ross.

airfields. Damage was slight in proportion to the size of the attack. Three aircraft were destroyed on the ground, others were damaged, and fuel dumps were set on fire and destroyed. Seven soldiers were killed. For their part the enemy lost an estimated 14 bombers and eight fighters shot down; two bombers by anti-aircraft battery fire, and the rest by fighters from Port Moresby, and by two squadrons from Dobodura which intercepted the retiring Japanese over Cape Ward Hunt. This Moresby raid coincided with an enemy reinforcement operation. At Hansa Bay, about midway between Wewak and Madang, a convoy of two destroyers and six merchant ships was attacked by Allied bombers, and another convoy of seven ships was sighted at Wewak.

Milne Bay came into the picture on 14th April when, in its twenty-fourth air raid, 40 to 50 bombers and about 60 fighters attacked, and concentrated on ships in the bay. These included the British *Gorgon*, and Dutch *Van Outhoorn*, *Van Heemskerck*, and *Balikpapan*. The last-mentioned two arrived just before the enemy aircraft, escorted by *Kapunda* (Lieut-Commander Dixon). The corvette brought the tally of her class in Milne Bay for the raid up to three—*Whyalla* (Lieut-Commander Oom) and *Wagga*<sup>3</sup> (Lieutenant Cracknell<sup>4</sup>) being already there. Warning of the impending raid, and an intimation of its size, were given when the enemy aircraft were approaching over the Trobriands. Commander Branson, the N.O.I.C., took advantage of the breathing space personally to tour the harbour in the air-sea rescue launch *Lauriana*, dispersing ships and taking all possible precautions to avoid offering targets. The enemy arrived overhead about 12.15, 30 high-level bombers in close formation and 10 dive bombers, with an uncertain number of fighters. The high-level aircraft opened the attack by dropping a pattern of about 100 bombs right across the anchorage. This, however, had been cleared, so that no ships were lost in this attack. *Van Outhoorn* suffered damage from near misses by high-level bombers, had eight killed and 20 wounded, and was succoured by *Whyalla*, who did a fine job with anti-aircraft fire. *Gorgon* was hit a number of times by dive bombers, and set on fire, with her engines out of action. Six of her company were killed or died of wounds, and 28 were wounded. Dixon took *Kapunda* alongside, ran hoses on board and helped with the fire fighting and in berthing the ship; and finally took her in tow for the mainland, helped by the *James Wallace*. Two of *Kapunda*'s officers later recalled that

progress down the [Milne] bay was slow and erratic while the correct length of tow was found, even with the tug's assistance. Our tow was of six thousand-odd gross tons, and we only nine hundred; and furthermore she could only be steered by emergency hand steering aft. China Strait was negotiated safely, though she took one or two frightening sheers. Once clear, she veered three shackles of cable, making the length of tow approximately five hundred and sixty feet. The tug went ahead of us, passed us her towing hawser, so that we towed in tandem, a total

<sup>3</sup> HMAS *Wagga*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>4</sup> Lt D. K. Cracknell, RANR. Comd HMAS's *Terka* 1940-42, *Wagga* 1942-43. Of Wollongong, NSW; b. Grimsby, England, 5 May 1901. Died 6 Sep 1953.

length of fourteen hundred feet, from the tug's stem to the merchantman's stern. . . . Certainly God was with us, for the next few days the Coral Sea was at its best, smooth as glass, enabling us to average the excellent speed of 7.1 knots from start to finish.<sup>5</sup>

In commending *Kapunda* and her ship's company for their help in saving *Gorgon*, Branson also praised that ship's chief officer, Mr James Bruce; Major Brew of the Docks Operating Company; and Able Seaman Larkin<sup>6</sup> (one of the ship's D.E.M.S. gunners) for their removal of an unexploded Japanese bomb from among the ship's cargo of ammunition in No. 5 lower hold.

As stated above, *Van Heemskerk* arrived in Milne Bay with *Kapunda* just before the raid—and there she remained, beached, a total loss, also as a result of dive-bomb hits. She was the final casualty suffered by LILLIPUT, of which she was Stage 28. *Wagga* put up a gallant fight to save the Dutch ship, going alongside and putting nine hoses and a fire party on board. But the fire had too great a hold, and *Van Heemskerk* finally blew up about 5 p.m. In this raid, apart from the loss and damage to ships, four Allied servicemen were killed, as were 12 of the merchant ships' crews. In all—servicemen, civilians of the Small Ships Section and ships' crews—68 were wounded. Forty-four Allied fighters intercepted and the enemy lost ten bombers and three fighters, three of which were victims to anti-aircraft fire.<sup>7</sup> *Wagga* and *Kapunda* suffered superficial damage. Of the work of these two and *Whyalla* on this occasion, Branson remarked in his report: "We were indeed fortunate to have the assistance of the three corvettes."

Four days after the Milne Bay raid, Admiral Yamamoto cancelled the "I" operation and ordered all remaining *Third Fleet* aircraft back to their carriers. According to Japanese reports<sup>8</sup> he believed, from the claims made by the Japanese aviators, that "I" operation had resulted in the Allies losing one cruiser, two destroyers, 25 transports, and 175 aircraft; whereas actual losses in the Solomons and New Guinea attacks were one destroyer, one tanker, one corvette (Solomons), and one transport (New Guinea), and "perhaps 25 planes". But, in fact, "faulty Intelligence, dispersal of effort and, above all, failure to follow up, contributed to defeat the purposes of the operation. Air power without naval gunfire proved to be as ineffective as ships without air cover."

Two days later, on 18th April, Yamamoto was killed. American Intelligence learned that he intended visiting Japanese bases in the Solomons.

At 6 a.m. on 18th April he took off from Rabaul in a Betty bomber for the Japanese air base at Ballale. With him were three of his staff officers while

<sup>5</sup> *H.M.A.S. Mk. II*, p. 165; from the article "Twirps, One, For the Use Of", by Lieutenants F. D. Simon and D. A. L. Davies.

<sup>6</sup> AB R. K. Larkin, F2363/17. HMS *Kanimbla*; *Gorgon* and *Buranda*. B. Wuraming, WA, 11 Dec 1917.

<sup>7</sup> At the time it was believed that five dive bombers fell to anti-aircraft fire. *Gorgon* and *Kapunda* each claimed to have shot down one, and *Balikpapan* claimed two victims. One was claimed by the Kana Kopa battery on shore.

<sup>8</sup> "Southeast Area Operations", Part 2 (Navy). Quoted by Morison, Vol VI, p. 127.

Vice-Admiral Matome Ugaki, chief of staff of the combined Japanese Fleet, with four other staff officers, followed in a second bomber. When off the west coast of Bougainville and approaching Ballale the two Betty bombers were attacked by four American Lightning fighters which broke through the Japanese fighter cover. Ugaki, anxiously watching the other bomber in which his commander-in-chief was flying, was (as he expressed it later) "horrified to see it flying slowly just above the jungle, heading to the south with bright orange flames rapidly enveloping the wings and fuselage. . . . Although I hoped for the best I knew only too well what the fate of the aircraft would be. As our [own] bomber snapped out of its turn I scanned the jungle. The Betty was no longer in sight. Black smoke boiled from the dense jungle into the air. . . ." And so Yamamoto died. Ugaki's own bomber was also shot down into the sea but he himself escaped.<sup>9</sup>

Yamamoto's body was recovered in the jungle, cremated, and the ashes carried to Tokyo, where they were given an impressive public funeral on 5th June. His death, as was later remarked by Vice-Admiral Fukudome during a post-war interrogation, "dealt an almost unbelievable blow to the morale of all the military forces of Japan".

"I" operation was over, but sporadic raids of varying intensity continued. Oro Bay was visited by 20 bombers and 20 to 25 fighters in the forenoon of 14th May, and bombs were dropped there and on near-by Port Harvey. A bitumen dump was set on fire and a petrol-laden barge destroyed; three soldiers were killed and 12 injured. About 40 Allied fighters intercepted the raiders and claimed to have shot down seven bombers and nine fighters for the loss of one fighter. The raid occurred "between visits" of LILLIPUT stages. SC750,<sup>1</sup> escorting *Reijnst*, had just left for Milne Bay, and at about the time of the raid *Thedens* (2,071 tons), escorted by *Bowen*, was leaving Milne Bay for Oro Bay; so LILLIPUT did not suffer on this occasion. Indeed the operation was carried to its conclusion on 17th June—when Stage 40, the American Liberty ship *Key Pittman* arrived back in Milne Bay from Oro Bay—without further incident. Stage 40 was the last of LILLIPUT under that name, but between LILLIPUT's conclusion and 5th July, six more similar convoys were run from Milne Bay to Oro Bay and Goodenough Island without loss. *Swan*, *Wagga*, *Bowen*, and three American P.C's (patrol craft) were the escorts in these six convoys, and in most instances (the exception was the Australian Bass Strait ferry *Taroona*) the merchant ships were American. LILLIPUT itself remained a monument to the fine service of the Dutch ships which, almost without exception, constituted its transport side. Their contribution was invaluable, and during the period of LILLIPUT they were irreplaceable. But the strain of the air attacks, and the loss of three of the ships, were telling, particularly on their native crews, as the K.P.M. marine superintendent, Captain Koning, reported to Branson after the Milne Bay air raid. In doing so, he spoke enthusiastically of the work of the Australian corvettes, expressing—as Branson said in a letter to the Naval Board on 20th April,

<sup>9</sup> D. Gillison, *Royal Australian Air Force, 1939-1942* (1962), pp. 701-2, in the air series of this history.

<sup>1</sup> SC750, US submarine chaser (1942), 95 tons, one 40-mm gun, 20 kts.

high appreciation of the escort work of H.M.A. corvettes between East Cape and Oro Bay. His captains all speak very highly of the fine seamanship and fighting qualities displayed by these small but gallant ships!

With the conclusion of "I" operation—and apart from the occasional air raids—life became quieter again at Port Moresby. Writing on 30th June 1943, and summarising the events of the second quarter of the year there, Hunt wrote: "Apart from the 100-plane daylight raid on 12th April, enemy activity was confined to a few small nuisance raids on moonlight nights." And, to come down to earth in a sidelight on the naval life of Port Moresby, Hunt also recorded in this report that "deposits in the *Basilisk* agency of the Commonwealth Savings Bank, which commenced business on 1st May, reached the respectable total of £7,000 at the end of June".

On the day Hunt made the above entry in the Port Moresby Letter of Proceedings, the Allied offensive was launched in the Solomons and New Guinea. A warning instruction for these operations was issued by MacArthur on 6th May, the objectives being as stated in the third ELKTON Plan. MacArthur's instruction defined the lines of attack along two axes:

In the west, along the north-east New Guinea coast to seize Lae and secure airfields in the Markham River Valley, thence eastward to seize western New Britain airdromes. The advance along the New Guinea coast will continue to the seizure of Madang to protect our western flank. In the east, north-westward through the Solomons to seize southern Bougainville, including the airdromes of the Buin-Faisi area, neutralising or capturing airdromes on New Georgia. Later occupy Kieta and neutralise hostile airdromes in the vicinity of Buka Passage. All operations are preparatory to the eventual capture of Rabaul and the occupation of the Bismarck Archipelago.

The initial operations in the New Guinea area—originally nominated for 1st June in MacArthur's instruction—were the occupation of Kiriwina and Woodlark Islands and the establishment there of air forces. In the Solomons area, invasion of the New Georgia group and/or Ysabel Island was called for. Provision was made for a simultaneous "feint" operation in the Salamaua area to distract from the main operations, and at the instigation of General Blamey this proposed feint was lifted to an operation preliminary to the assault on Lae—the prior seizure of a shore base within 60 miles of that objective. Thus a landing at Nassau Bay, 30 miles south of Lae, was also scheduled for 30th June, to serve the double purpose of distraction and preparation.

In the Solomons, the Australian coastwatchers played an important part in preparatory work. The New Georgia area was badly charted, and the islands themselves were unmapped. Aerial photography did not provide the needed information, and the local knowledge of coastwatchers was called upon, and their help in receiving and guiding reconnaissance parties inserted some days before the landings. Kennedy at Segi, Horton on Rendova, Robinson<sup>2</sup> and Corrigan<sup>3</sup> were among them. Segi was the

<sup>2</sup> Sqn Ldr R. A. Robinson, MBE. (1st AIF: 3 MG Bn.) Coastwatcher, AIB. Plantation inspector; of New Britain; b. Sydney, 19 Jul 1897. Died 4 Oct 1948.

<sup>3</sup> F-Lt J. A. Corrigan. Coastwatcher, AIB. Mine manager; of Wewak, NG; b. 14 Nov 1904.

base and point of insertion for the reconnaissance parties operating around Munda, and to ensure its protection (since Japanese control there would have disrupted all plans) 400 Marines were landed there in the night 20th-21st June from the destroyer transports *Dent* and *Waters*,<sup>4</sup> guided in by Kennedy's beach bonfires. And when Admiral Turner's III Amphibious Force moved northwards from Guadalcanal, coastwatcher Lieutenant Dyce<sup>5</sup> was in flagship *McCawley*, with a teleradio, to make sure of communications with the coastwatchers on shore up to the moment of landing. The landings, at dawn on 30th June, were carried out simultaneously and successfully at Rendova (where coastwatcher Rhoades landed with the first wave, which was joined by Horton when it reached shore), Wickham Anchorage, Viru Harbour, and Segi. The most active opponent met with in the initial operation was the weather.

In the New Guinea area, troops and ships had been concentrated in the final staging areas for the Trobriands occupation—the Woodlark force at Townsville and that for Kiriwina in Milne Bay. As in the Solomons, reconnaissance parties gathered information on both islands. Feldt himself, the only one available at the time with knowledge of Woodlark, assumed command of *Paluma* and took three American engineer officers and one medical officer on a ten-day survey of that island. From April, Lieutenant Mollison<sup>6</sup> was there with a party, and there was an Angau group on Kiriwina. No Japanese were on either island so that, as the American naval historian recorded, "the operation was prosaic". The Woodlark force, in destroyer-transports and L.S.T's, was transported from Townsville and landed without incident. H.M.A. Ships *Benalla* and *Shepparton*<sup>7</sup> helped in the Kiriwina operation, the craft for which, mostly L.C.T's, L.C.I's, and L.C.M's, left Milne Bay on 29th June, as escorts and in piloting landing craft to their destinations. During the first three weeks of occupation VII Amphibious Force put 16,000 men into the islands without losing a single ship, boat, or man. And an airstrip was built on Woodlark. The movement westward of the war left both islands out of the picture so that they were unable to make use of the role of "fixed aircraft carriers". Yet the dividend on the investment of effort and materials in their occupation was a good one. The amphibious experiment sifted the grain of experience from the chaff of theory, and was a valuable introduction to the series of landings which VII Amphibious Force was to make in the months ahead.

While Turner's force moved northwards from Guadalcanal, and Barbey's made for Kiriwina from Milne Bay in the night of 29th June, MacKechnie Force—I/162nd U.S. Battalion—of just on 1,000 officers and men, set off by sea from Mageri Point to land at Nassau Bay, 40 miles north-west

<sup>4</sup> *Dent* and *Waters*, US destroyer-transports (1918), 1,090 tons, two 4-in guns, 25 kts.

<sup>5</sup> Lt A. Dyce, RANVR. Coastwatcher, AIB. Student; of Eastwood, NSW; b. West Maitland, NSW, 7 Jun 1916.

<sup>6</sup> Lt P. J. Mollison, RANVR. Coastwatcher, AIB. Patrol officer; of Melbourne and New Guinea; b. Melbourne, 17 Apr 1913.

<sup>7</sup> HMAS's *Benalla* and *Shepparton*, corvettes (1943), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

along the New Guinea coast. This had been reported by a coastwatcher in the Morobe area, Sub-Lieutenant Bridge,<sup>8</sup> as lightly held by the Japanese. The force was carried in three P.T. boats and 32 landing craft. Australians of the 17th Brigade had a key role in this operation, that of working down to the Nassau Bay beach from inland, reaching there before the arrival time of the seaborne Americans, and setting up beach-lights to guide the landing craft to the beach. The landing—first of its size to be carried out in enemy-occupied territory in the South-West Pacific Area—was a success which emerged from confusion and disruption, caused by weather, the sea, navigational inexperience, and other factors. These conjoined to make finding the beach difficult—the leading P.T. boat, which was acting as guide, overshot it and this started the confusion—and landing conditions hazardous in a high and heavy surf. The landing craft ran in an hour or so after midnight on the 29th, guided by the Australian beach-lights, under conditions in which

the boats were tossed about like match sticks as they approached the shore. Much equipment, weapons and ammunition were lost in the landing but every soldier was put safely ashore. Most of the boats were unable to retract and twenty-one of them were left swamped on the beach, twisted in every direction while the surf pounded them into distorted shapes within a few minutes.<sup>9</sup>

Taking the circumstances into consideration, the landing was a creditable feat, as Lieutenant Burke,<sup>1</sup> the Australian in charge of the beach guiding lights, wrote later: "It was a great effort on the part of the troops and the inexperienced navigators in the landing craft, that they ever managed to reach the beach in one piece." By daylight on the 30th, 770 officers and men had landed; those in the three P.T. boats were unable to do so because of the loss of the landing craft, and they were taken back to Morobe. Australian Naval Intelligence was represented at the landing by Lieut-Commander G. J. Brooksbank, Assistant S.O.I. North Eastern Area, who went along as observer. By Independence Day, 1,477 troops of MacKechnie Force were on shore at Nassau Bay. Order was being brought to a congested beach-head. The first step was established on the road to Lae.

## XI

In these varied operations of 29th-30th June the Australian Navy's representation so far as ships were concerned was mainly by those of the Task Force, which operated in support in the Coral Sea. Commenting in December 1942 on the three months' Coral Sea patrol just ending for the task force, Admiral Crutchley described the period as having been uneventful. No enemy forces had been sighted, nor had there been any sign of Japanese aircraft. On 10th January 1943 Comsouwespacfor, Admiral Carpenter, ordered that continuous Coral Sea patrol should cease

<sup>8</sup> Lt K. W. T. Bridge, DSC; AIF and RANVR. "M" and "Z" Special Units; coastwatcher, AIB. Patrol officer; of Bougainville, Solomon Is; b. Canterbury, Vic, 12 Oct 1907.

<sup>9</sup> *History of the Second Engineer Special Brigade* (1946), p. 39.

<sup>1</sup> Capt D. B. Burke, MC; 2/6 Bn. Physical culturist; of East St Kilda, Vic; b. Hobart, 14 Oct 1916.



and the disposition of the ships be modified to maintain a task group of one cruiser and two destroyers at short notice at a Barrier Reef anchorage; a similarly constituted group in the north-east area at longer notice to permit training and upkeep; and a task group in Moreton Bay exercising, drilling, and conducting firing practices. This was done. The group based on Moreton Bay—Task Group 44.3, *Australia*, and the American destroyers *Henley*, *Helm*, and *Bagley*—left there early in February for the south. *Australia* spent ten days in Sydney being equipped with improved radar, and on 17th February the four ships sailed for Melbourne to provide coastal escort for convoy “Pamphlet”, comprising *Queen Mary*, *Aquitania*, *Ile de France*, *Nieuw Amsterdam*, and the armed merchant cruiser *Queen of Bermuda* (22,575 tons) bringing back the 9th Division from the Middle East. “Pamphlet”, escorted by the cruiser *Devonshire* as ocean escort, left Suez on 4th February. Six destroyers<sup>2</sup> provided anti-submarine screen as far as Socotra, after which the cruiser *Gambia* joined the escort. In the Indian Ocean cover was given by Force “A” of the Eastern Fleet, *Warspite*, *Resolution*, *Revenge*, *Mauritius*,<sup>3</sup> and six destroyers. Approaching Fremantle, where the convoy arrived on 18th February, the escort was further strengthened by the Dutch cruisers *Tromp* and *Jacob van Heemskerck*, and two destroyers.

In Australian Government circles there was some concern regarding the safety of the troops, and the question was discussed at an Advisory War Council meeting on 17th February, the day Task Group 44.3 left Sydney for Melbourne to meet and escort the convoy. There was a suggestion that the troops be brought overland from Fremantle, but the Chief of the General Staff, General Northcott,<sup>4</sup> pointed out that there were 30,000 troops in the convoy, their transportation overland would overburden the railways, and the troops would be immobilised for several months. It was therefore agreed that they come from the west by sea, but the council, while considering that the assessment of risks and provision of naval and air protection were essentially matters for the Naval and Air Staffs, desired “that the maximum protection possible should be provided for the convoy both as to surface escort and air reconnaissance and cover, particularly when the convoy is in focal waters”. The convoy left Fremantle escorted by *Adelaide* and *Jacob van Heemskerck*, and the destroyer *Tjerk Hiddes*. It was met in the Bight by Task Force 44.3. *Adelaide* and the Dutch ships then detached with the Melbourne ships of the convoy, and the Sydney section, escorted by Task Group 44.3, proceeded south of Tasmania to its destination, the escort being strengthened on the way by *Jacob van Heemskerck* and the French *Le Triomphant*. Sydney was reached without incident on 27th February. Task Group 44.3 then returned north.

<sup>2</sup> HMS's *Pakenham*, *Petard*, *Isis*, *Derwent* and *Hero*, and the Greek *Queen Olga*.

<sup>3</sup> HMS *Mauritius*, cruiser (1939), 8,000 tons, twelve 6-in guns, eight 4-in AA guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

<sup>4</sup> General Sir John Northcott, KCMG, KCVO, CB, GOC 1 Armd Div 1941-42; CGS 1942-45. Governor of NSW 1946-57. Regular soldier; of Melbourne; b. Creswick, Vic, 24 Mar 1890. Died 4 Aug 1966.

On 15th March Task Force 44 was reorganised as Task Force 74, and Seventh Fleet was formed. Task Force 74 began with three cruisers—*Australia*, *Hobart*, *Phoenix*, and seven destroyers—*Mugford*, *Patterson*, *Henley*, *Helm*, *Bagley*, *Ralph Talbot*, and *Selfridge*. It did not long remain so constituted, nor did it assemble as a complete force. One or more of the cruisers was generally away refitting (*Phoenix* detached in April to return to the United States for modernisation), and always some destroyers were away on escort or other duties. In May H.M.A. destroyers *Warramunga* and *Arunta* joined the Task Force, and also in that month the destroyers of Desron 4—which since July 1942 had formed part of the Task Force, both as 44 and 74—were withdrawn, and Desron 5 was substituted.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the first half of 1943 the Task Force maintained a striking force available at short notice in the north-eastern area, with the balance either at Brisbane or undergoing overhaul at Sydney, or escorting. For a considerable period it had been on routine patrols and exercises, and it had seen nothing of the enemy since the Guadalcanal landings in August 1942. But more activity was now to be experienced.

In June all the destroyers excepting *Warramunga*, *Arunta*, and *Lamson*, were transferred to Task Force 76 (Amphibious Forces) for the forthcoming operations, and on the 23rd of the month Task Force 74 was constituted at Challenger Bay: Task Group 74.1, *Australia*, *Hobart*; Task Group 74.2 *Warramunga* (Commander Dechaineux, Senior Officer), *Arunta*, *Lamson*. On the 29th Task Force 74 entered the Coral Sea to destroy any enemy units threatening lines of communication in the Coral Sea or eastern Arafura Sea, and be prepared to cooperate with South Pacific forces in the event of a major threat to the movement of transports in the northern Coral Sea. In the event, it was not called upon for action at this stage, and on 4th July withdrew to the Flinders Group to refuel.

In the meantime, with the development of the New Georgia invasion, there was considerable naval activity in the Solomons in the battles of Kula Gulf and Kolombangara. On 1st July the American second echelon landed on Rendova. Next day advance units started ferrying across Blanche Channel to a landing at Zanana, five miles east of Munda, whence it was planned to move on the airfield through the jungle. To block Japanese reinforcements from Kolombangara reaching Munda overland from Kula Gulf, the Americans sent a force of 2,600 Marines to Rice Anchorage on the coast of this neck of New Georgia, ten miles due north of Zanana. The transportation of this force—with which operation was combined a bombardment of Japanese positions on Kolombangara and New Georgia—led to the battle of Kula Gulf, since the Japanese also planned troop transportation there in a reinforcement of Vila, Kolombangara.

Americans—three cruisers and four destroyers—and Japanese—10 destroyers, seven of them carrying troops—clashed at 2 a.m. on 6th July in the entrance to Kula Gulf. In the resulting action the Americans lost

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<sup>5</sup> *Perkins, Conyngham, Mahan, Flusser, Drayton, Smith and Lamson.*

the cruiser *Helena* to a Japanese "long lance" torpedo.<sup>6</sup> The Japanese lost the destroyer *Niizuki* (2,450 tons) to gunfire and *Nagatsuki*<sup>7</sup> to a navigational hazard on Kolombangara, but successfully landed their troops and unloaded supplies. Of *Helena*'s 739 survivors, 165 landed on Vella Lavella, where they were succoured by coastwatchers Henry Josselyn, Robert Firth<sup>8</sup>—lieutenant and sub-lieutenant R.A.N.V.R. respectively—and the Reverend A. W. Silvester of the Methodist Mission. The Japanese (there were some 600 on the island) did not interfere, and the coastwatchers' guests, who by this time had nearly eaten them out of house and home, were picked up on 16th July by destroyer transports *Dent* and *Waters* and returned safely to Tulagi. The coastwatchers were also actively concerned in the New Georgia invasion, where Flight Lieutenant Corrigan provided native guides and carriers and helped the northern, Rice Anchorage, force to move inland, and handled the radio traffic for the force. Rear-Admiral T. S. Wilkinson, U.S.N., who on 15th July succeeded Turner in command of III Amphibious Force, reported of Corrigan: "His performance reflects great credit, not only upon . . . Corrigan, but also on the Service of which he is a part."

Ashore on New Georgia the battle for Munda proceeded slowly. Bad country and stiff opposition held up the southern American force, and the Marines in the north were also halted, with the need for reinforcements. These the Japanese were getting by barge from Kolombangara, staging point for destroyers of the "Tokyo Express". It was an "Express" run which led to the next naval clash, in the night of 12th-13th July in the battle of Kolombangara. At 5.30 a.m. on the 12th, light cruiser *Jintsu* and five destroyers left Rabaul escorting four destroyer transports with 1,200 reinforcements for Kolombangara. To oppose this landing, Rear-Admiral W. L. Ainsworth, with *Honolulu*, *St Louis*, and the New Zealand cruiser *Leander*—which had replaced *Helena*—and 10 destroyers left Tulagi that afternoon and headed up The Slot. Contact was made seven miles or so north-east of Kolombangara just after 1 a.m. on the 13th. In the opening minutes of the action *Jintsu* disintegrated under concentrated gunfire from the three Allied cruisers. The Japanese admiral and nearly all hands were lost. The Allies lost one destroyer, U.S.S. *Gwin*.<sup>9</sup> But all three cruisers were torpedoed, victims to Japanese "long lances". *Honolulu* and *St Louis* were out of the war for four months, *Leander* for more than a year. Again the Japanese successfully landed their reinforcements.

It was 6th August before Munda was captured after desperate fighting by both Americans and Japanese; and the 23rd before ground fighting

<sup>6</sup> These were 24-inch torpedoes, oxygen-fuelled, capable of travelling approximately 11 miles at 49 knots, and with a warhead carrying 1,036 pounds of H.E.

<sup>7</sup> *Nagatsuki*, Japanese destroyer (1927), 1,315 tons, four 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts. Sunk off Kolombangara, 6 Jul 1943.

<sup>8</sup> Sub-Lt R. Firth, RANVR. Coastwatcher, AIB. Branch manager; of Tulagi, BSIP; b. Manchester, England, 9 Aug 1909.

<sup>9</sup> *Gwin*, US destroyer (1941), 1,630 tons, four 5-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts. Sunk off Kolombangara, 13 Jul 1942.

ended on New Georgia. Not until 20th September was Arundel Island—stretching across the foot of Kula Gulf between New Georgia and Kolombangara—finally in American hands. The fighting on land was matched by clashes at sea between Japanese barges (Daihatsus<sup>1</sup>) and “Tokyo Express” groups, and American destroyers and P.T. boats. Four squadrons of P.T. boats, comprising about 52 boats, operated in the New Georgia campaign from Rendova Harbour, and from Lever Harbour near the northernmost tip of New Georgia on The Slot side. In the night 1st-2nd August a Japanese “Tokyo Express” destroyer group successfully ran supplies through to Vila despite attempts by P.T. boats to frustrate the effort. As the enemy ships retired on the fulfilment of their mission, the destroyer *Amagiri* rammed and sank *PT109*, commanded by Lieutenant John F. Kennedy, U.S.N.R. Kennedy and the surviving 10 members of his crew—two were lost—got on shore on a small island east of Gizo. Thence Kennedy sent a message, scratched on a coconut shell, by friendly natives to Wana Wana Island, where Lieutenant Evans was coastwatcher. Evans organised transport for Kennedy, who arrived hidden under ferns in the bottom of a native canoe. Thus a future President of the United States was succoured by an Australian coastwatcher, and arrangements were made for the rescue from their island hiding place of the remainder of his ship’s company by another P.T. boat.

There was one more sizeable naval clash before the end of the New Georgia campaign when, in the night of 6th-7th August, six American destroyers clashed with four Japanese destroyers of a “Tokyo Express” carrying 900 troops and 50 tons of supplies for Kolombangara. In the resulting battle of Vella Gulf, the Japanese lost destroyers *Arashi*, *Kawakaze* and *Hagikaze*<sup>2</sup> to American torpedoes and gunfire. Some 1,500 Japanese sailors and soldiers perished in the action. The Americans suffered neither damage nor casualties.

## XII

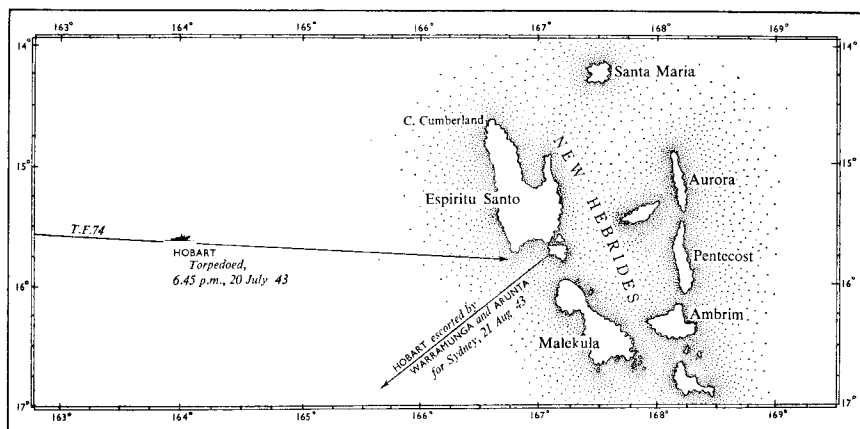
These events in the Solomons were reflected in the ensuing operations of the Australian Task Force 74, which General MacArthur offered for service with Third Fleet as soon as he heard of the mishaps to its cruisers. Admiral Crutchley, who had left the Flinders Group with the Task Force on 10th July in support of the New Guinea operations, reported to Admiral Halsey at Espiritu Santo on the 16th. On the 18th the composition of the force was changed. *Arunta*, *Warramunga* and *Lamson* were detached for service with Seventh Fleet and were replaced by *Jenkins*, *O'Bannon*, *Radford* and *Nicholas*<sup>3</sup> of Desron 21. The newly constituted force operated as required in an area approximately 200 miles west of Espiritu Santo.

<sup>1</sup> The Daihatsu was the type of barge mostly used by the Japanese in the Solomons. Metal-hulled and diesel-powered, it was between 40 and 50 feet long, weighed 8 tons, carried 100-120 men or 10-15 tons of cargo, made eight knots, and was armed with at least two machine-guns as standard equipment.

<sup>2</sup> *Hagikaze*, Japanese destroyer (1941), 1,900 tons, six 5-in guns, eight 24-in torpedo tubes, 36 kts. Sunk in Vella Gulf, 6 Aug 1943.

<sup>3</sup> *Jenkins*, *O'Bannon*, *Radford*, *Nicholas*, US destroyers (1942), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

At sunset on the 20th Task Force 74, less *Jenkins*, was proceeding to Espiritu Santo. The two cruisers were in column, with *Hobart* 600 yards astern of *Australia*, and the three destroyers providing anti-submarine screen. The weather was fine and clear with extreme visibility. The sea was moderate. The ships were darkened, steaming at 23 knots and zigzagging. At 6.45 p.m., in position 15 degrees 7 minutes south and 163 degrees 34 minutes east, *Hobart* was struck by a torpedo aft on the port side. The ship suffered considerable structural damage in the vicinity of the wardroom, lost all high power electric supply and steering control, and took a slight



Torpedoing of H.M.A.S. *Hobart*

list to port. Casualties were seven officers and six ratings killed, and six officers and one rating injured.<sup>4</sup> Power and steering were quickly restored and the crippled cruiser, screened by *Nicholas* and *Radford*, reached Espiritu Santo on the 21st. There was no indication of the presence of a submarine prior to the torpedoing, nor had any reported D/F fixes indicated that there was one anywhere near the position where *Hobart* was torpedoed. In a subsequent reconstruction, Admiral Crutchley concluded that the attacking submarine, on the surface, had probably sighted T.F. 74 against the afterglow in the western sky at about 6.15 at a distance of about 10 miles. It was right in the course of the Task Force, submerged, and fired a salvo of torpedoes—probably at long range—aimed at *Australia* and spread towards *Hobart*. Underestimation of the speed of the force caused the torpedo zone to miss *Australia*, and it was probably the first torpedo of the salvo which only just caught *Hobart*, the remainder passing ahead of that ship.

*Hobart* remained in Espiritu Santo undergoing temporary repairs until

<sup>4</sup> Those killed were: Pay-Cdr H. M. Johnson, RAN; Surgeon-Lt J. M. Gaskell, RANR; Lt J. S. Ellis, RAN; W/Engineer R. E. Brown, RAN; Gnr J. G. Tyrrell, RAN; Gnr R. R. R. Callaby, RAN; AB F. G. Latham, RAN; AB C. Baron, RANR; AB A. C. S. Smith, RANR; AB A. E. Phillips, RANR; Ord Art E. K. King, RANR; Steward R. M. Minorgan, RANR.

21st August. That day *Warramunga* and *Arunta*, who had been employed escorting, patrolling and so on in the Milne Bay-Trobriands area, arrived at Espiritu Santo, and the three ships, with the destroyers screening the damaged cruiser, sailed for Sydney, where they arrived on the 26th of the month. There *Hobart* remained for the rest of the year being repaired. She left Sydney for Melbourne on a shake-down cruise on 30th December, under the command of Captain Dowling, who succeeded Captain Showers.

Thus for some weeks the Royal Australian Navy, whose cruiser strength at the outbreak of war in 1939 was six, was reduced to two effective ships in that category in Far Eastern waters, *Australia* and *Adelaide*. But another heavy cruiser—H.M.A.S. *Shropshire*—was on her way out from England to replace the lost *Canberra*.

On 8th September 1942, just one month after *Canberra* was lost in the Savo Island battle, the British Prime Minister announced:

His Majesty's Government consider that the Commonwealth should not bear this grievous loss following the sinking of other gallant Australian ships. We have therefore decided to offer, fully and unconditionally, to transfer H.M. 8-inch gun cruiser *Shropshire* to the Commonwealth Government. This offer has been most warmly received.

As a unit of the Royal Navy *Shropshire* took a strenuous part in the naval war, largely on convoy escort and patrol work in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and she was prominent in the operations leading to the British occupation of Italian Somaliland. With the decision of the British Cabinet to offer the cruiser to Australia—which, the British Minister of Labour and National Service, Mr Ernest Bevin, said was unanimous when he addressed the ship's company at Scapa Flow after she commissioned as H.M.A. Ship—*Shropshire* was recalled from the South Atlantic Station and proceeded to Chatham to refit. Her commanding officer, Captain J. T. Borrett, relinquished command on 23rd December 1942, and five days later Commander D. H. Harries, R.A.N., assumed command to supervise the refit and transfer. At this stage in her history *Shropshire* had steamed more than 364,000 miles since first commissioning in September 1929, and nearly 220,000 of that mileage had been accomplished since the outbreak of war ten years later. It had been intended to rename the ship *Canberra*, but the Americans had also decided to pay a tribute to the Australian cruiser lost at Savo by naming one of their new ships for her, and early in 1943 a heavy cruiser<sup>5</sup> launched at the Fore River yard of the Bethlehem Steel Company was so christened, the ceremony being performed by Lady Dixon, wife of the Australian Minister to Washington. It was therefore decided to retain the name *Shropshire*, and as such the *Canberra*'s successor was commissioned in the Royal Australian Navy.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Canberra*, US cruiser (1943), 13,600 tons, nine 8-in and twelve 5-in guns, four aircraft, 33 kts.

<sup>6</sup> "Prior to commissioning by the Royal Australian Navy it was rumoured that *Shropshire* might be renamed. We are glad that wisdom prevailed, since this ship was 'bought' during Warships Week by the County of Shropshire for the sum of £2,343,000. Coming as a gift from the British Government, retaining the county name and being manned by Australians, *Shropshire* in a unique way has forged another link of Empire." From the Editor's Preface to *Porthole* (1946), the ship's company's souvenir book of HMAS *Shropshire*.

During the early months of 1943 Captain J. A. Collins, who had been appointed in command, proceeded to England from Australia. He assumed command on 7th April, with Harries as executive officer. Ten days later the main draft of 10 officers and 426 ratings, including many of *Canberra's* survivors, arrived from Australia and joined the ship on the 20th, when she commissioned.

The refit was completed on 12th June, and on the 25th the Commander-in-Chief, The Nore, Admiral Sir George D'Oyly Lyon, inspected the ship and handed her over to Collins and she became officially R.A.N., with the Australian Jack broken at an improvised jackstaff. On 1st July she left London River for Scapa Flow. There, on 12th August, she was boarded by King George VI and the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser.<sup>7</sup> The next day, Friday, 13th August,<sup>8</sup> she left Scapa for Australia, and reached Fremantle on Friday, 24th September. She joined Task Force 74 at Brisbane at the end of October 1943.

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<sup>7</sup> Admiral of Fleet Lord Fraser, GCB, KBE, CB; RN. Third Sea Lord and Controller 1939-42; C-in-C Home Fleet 1943-44, Eastern Fleet 1944, Pacific Fleet 1945-46, First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff 1948-51. B. 1888.

<sup>8</sup> That sailing on a Friday—and Friday the 13th to boot—does not always presage disaster, was shown in *Shropshire's* subsequent history. Though she took part in much heavy fighting in her three years of war with the RAN, her total casualties were one rating drowned, four ratings accidentally killed.

## CHAPTER 10

### INDIAN OCEAN—MEDITERRANEAN INTERLUDE

IN November 1940 the R.A.N. had lost its first ship in the war when the auxiliary minesweeper *Goorangai* was sunk in collision with a merchant ship in Port Phillip Bay. In June 1943 the navy lost its fifteenth ship in the war when the corvette *Wallaroo*<sup>1</sup> sank off Fremantle after a collision with a merchant ship. On 10th June *Wallaroo* (Lieutenant Ross,<sup>2</sup> R.A.N.R.) sailed from Fremantle escorting two American merchant ships, *John G. Whittier* (7,176 tons), and *Henry Gilbert Costin* (7,200 tons). Her instructions from Commodore Pope, the N.O.I.C. Fremantle, were to lead the convoy in column at 10½ knots, in order *Wallaroo* (giving anti-submarine protection), *John G. Whittier*, *Henry Gilbert Costin*, four cables apart, until moonset about midnight that night. The convoy was then to disperse to the respective ocean routes of the ships, and *Wallaroo* was to return to port. When the dispersal point was reached—about 60 miles west of Fremantle—at midnight on the 10th, there was a moderate westerly wind and moderate to rough sea, the moon had gone and the sky was overcast, with visibility about one mile. The three ships were darkened, steaming in column as pre-arranged, on course W. ¼ N. Ross, *Wallaroo*'s C.O., decided that weather conditions made further escorting unnecessary. He altered course to starboard to N.E. by E ½ E, and while turning signalled to *John G. Whittier* by lamp, to disperse. *Wallaroo* passed *John G. Whittier*, and then she and *Henry Gilbert Costin* each sighted the other on the starboard and port bows respectively, and the corvette passed the dispersal signal to the merchant ship.

As the ships approached each other, each commanding officer realised that a collision was imminent and took avoiding action. But it was too late, and *Henry Gilbert Costin* struck the corvette on the starboard side, mortally wounding her. Two ratings were killed in the collision, and one fell overboard and was lost.<sup>3</sup> *Wallaroo*'s C.O. was badly injured in the collision and the First Lieutenant, Lieutenant Hull,<sup>4</sup> took command. After an attempt to steam astern before the sea proved impracticable, Hull turned the ship with her engines and lay hove to, stern to sea. From 4 a.m. the weather worsened, and about 7 a.m. on the 11th, after two heavy seas had flooded the upper deck through the hole resulting from the collision, *Wallaroo* capsized to starboard, turned over, and sank. All the survivors of her company got clear. Meanwhile *Henry Gilbert Costin*, unaware of the

<sup>1</sup> HMAS *Wallaroo*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts. Sunk off Fremantle, 11 Jun 1943.

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Cdr E. S. Ross; RANR. HMAS *Burnie*; comd HMAS *Wallaroo* 1942-43. Of Wellington, NZ; b. Palmerston North, NZ, 24 Feb 1909.

<sup>3</sup> Killed in the collision were AB D. L. B. Cowen, H1875 and Motor Mechanic G. W. Garratty, 2551; AB J. J. Clarke, PM2278 was lost overboard.

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Cdr H. J. Hull, VRD; RANR. HMAS's *Kybra*, *Wallaroo*, *Cowra*, *Broome*; comd HMAS *Cootamundra* 1944-46. Reader; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Kew, Vic, 23 Apr 1911.



extent of damage to *Wallaroo*, returned to Fremantle where Pope had learned by signals of *Wallaroo*'s plight before her sinking, and had sailed H.M.A.S. *Dubbo*<sup>5</sup> (Lieutenant Weber<sup>6</sup>) to her aid, and also arranged with Fleet Air Wing 10 for an air search. A Catalina aircraft sighted the survivors in the water, spread over an area of about 10 miles, and they were picked up by *Dubbo* during the forenoon of the 11th without any more casualties.

At 30th June 1943 the total combat strength of the R.A.N. (excluding auxiliary minesweepers and other ships engaged on purely home-defence duties) was 83 ships, variously disposed and consisting of three cruisers, 10 destroyers, three sloops, 48 corvettes, 16 Fairmile motor launches, and the three L.S.I's. In the north-eastern area, north of Brisbane, were *Australia*, *Hobart*, *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, comprising Task Force 74 and patrolling in the Coral Sea; the destroyers *Stuart* and *Vendetta* and 15 corvettes.<sup>7</sup> In the north-western area were corvettes *Castlemaine* and *Inverell*, and in the south-western *Dubbo* and *Horsham*.<sup>8</sup> The sloops *Swan* and *Moresby* were in the eastern and southern area on escort work, where similarly engaged, were 12 corvettes.<sup>9</sup> Six destroyers<sup>1</sup> were with the Eastern Fleet (two of them, *Nepal* and *Quiberon*, spent some weeks in April and May refitting in Australia) as were 13 corvettes.<sup>2</sup> The 16 Fairmile motor launches were variously disposed and employed. In dock refitting, or undergoing trials, were the cruiser *Adelaide* (in Williamstown dockyard), the sloop *Warrego*, and corvettes *Ararat*, *Cootamundra*, *Gladstone*,<sup>3</sup> and *Whyalla*, the first named of which was newly commissioned, on 16th June.

## II

The Australian destroyers and corvettes operating on Australia's western flank were deployed and employed as events dictated and circumstances demanded. These affected dispositions and activities in both the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. In the first half of the year, German U-boats renewed their activities off the Cape, and gradually extended their operations northwards to the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Oman to intercept Red Sea and Persian Gulf traffic. Later in the year German submarines moved to the Far East, and operated from Penang, which the Japanese made available to them as a base. During the period February-April the "Sea-Dog" pack of four U-boats—*U 160*, *U 506*, *U 509* and *U 182*—which left Lorient at the turn of the year, operated in South African

<sup>5</sup> HMAS *Dubbo*, corvette (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>6</sup> Lt N. G. Weber, RANR. Comd HMAS's *Dubbo* 1942-44, *Cairns* 1944-45. Ship's officer; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 8 Mar 1907.

<sup>7</sup> *Benalla*, *Bowen*, *Bunbury*, *Colac*, *Fremantle*, *Geelong*, *Goulburn*, *Gympie*, *Kapunda*, *Katoomba*, *Latrobe*, *Lithgow*, *Pirie*, *Shepparton*, *Wagga*.

<sup>8</sup> HMAS's *Inverell* and *Horsham*, corvettes (1942), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>9</sup> *Ballarat*, *Bendigo*, *Broome*, *Bundaberg*, *Deloraine*, *Echuca*, *Glennelg*, *Kalgoorlie*, *Mildura*, *Rockhampton*, *Townsville*, *Warrnambool*.

<sup>1</sup> *Napier*, *Nepal*, *Nizam*, *Norman*, *Quiberon*, *Quickmatch*.

<sup>2</sup> *Bathurst*, *Burnie*, *Cairns*, *Cessnock*, *Gawler*, *Geraldton*, *Ipswich*, *Launceston*, *Lismore*, *Maryborough*, *Tamworth*, *Toowoomba*, *Wollongong*.

<sup>3</sup> HMAS's *Ararat* and *Gladstone*, corvettes (1943), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

waters. In their operational cruise they (plus two other submarines in the area at the time) sank 23 ships totalling 147,604 tons. *U 182* was lost with all hands. Two other U-boats operated in the area at this time, the Italian *Leonardo da Vinci*,<sup>4</sup> and the German *U 180*. *Leonardo da Vinci* was sunk with no survivors when approaching Bordeaux on 23rd May. *U 180* left Germany on 9th February, carrying material of value to the Japanese, and the Indian Nationalist Chandra Bose and his assistant. On 23rd April she met the Japanese submarine *I 29* to the south of Madagascar, with a cargo for Germany including two tons of gold. Cargoes were exchanged, and *U 180*'s two passengers were transferred to *I 29* (they were later landed in southern India to foment trouble there) and the submarines returned to their respective bases. The German reached Bordeaux safely on 3rd July. She sank two ships totalling 13,298 tons on the round voyage. This initial contact between Germany and Japan by operational and transport submarines was later extended.

The six Australian destroyers were in the western Indian Ocean, with occasional breaks for refitting, throughout most of the first half of the year, and divided their time between screening duties with the Eastern Fleet, then based on Kilindini, and convoy escorting and anti-submarine patrols. During February *Nizam* (Commander Brooks<sup>5</sup>), *Norman* and *Nepal* were with the fleet-covering convoy "Pamphlet" on that stage of its voyage to Australia; and in March *Quickmatch* was in company with a former Australian ship, H.M.S. *Albatross*, when she escorted her from Durban to Madagascar. That month the U-boats operating in South African waters had their best success in a not very fruitful period when they sank four ships in a convoy. Total U-boat successes in the area during February and March were 16 ships of 97,498 tons. In April six more German U-boats of the large "cruiser" class were on their way to southern waters, where they arrived late that month and in early May to operate along the offshore shipping routes from Walvis Bay in West Africa to Lourenco Marques and the Mozambique Channel in the east. To help in coping with this campaign a number of Eastern Fleet destroyers was temporarily detached to the South Atlantic Station, including *Nizam* and *Norman*. The U-boats in this area during April and May sank 14 ships of 86,151 tons. (*Quiberon* and *Nepal* sailed from Geraldton, Western Australia, on 1st June to rejoin the Eastern Fleet after refitting.)

June, July and August were months of heavy shipping losses in the Indian Ocean. June's losses to U-boats of 12 ships of 67,929 tons increased in July to 16 ships of 89,580 tons, and made this month's Indian Ocean losses the heaviest in any theatre. In addition to the losses to U-boats June saw two more ships fall victims to a surface raider there. German raider "H", *Michel*, who completed her first cruise on 3rd March 1943

<sup>4</sup> *Leonardo da Vinci*, Italian submarine (1940), 1,036 tons, two 3.9-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 18 kts. Sunk off Bordeaux, 23 May 1943.

<sup>5</sup> Capt C. H. Brooks, OBE; RAN. Comd HMS *Mistral* 1940-41; Staff C-in-C Eastern Fleet 1942-43; comd HMAS *Nizam* 1943-44; Director of Plans, Navy Office 1944-46. B. Kalamunda, WA, 3 Oct 1903. He succeeded Commander M. J. Clark in command of *Nizam* on 26th January 1943.

when she arrived at Kobe, only six days short of a year from the day she sailed from Germany in March 1942, left Yokohama on her second marauding venture on 21st May 1943. She was commanded by Captain Gumprich who, in *Thor*, had sunk a number of ships in the Indian Ocean in 1942, and was now again about to disrupt Australian communications, though to a lesser degree. On 15th June, about 1,800 miles west-north-west of Fremantle, *Michel* sank the Norwegian tanker *Hoegh Silverdawn* (7,715 tons) bound from the Australian port to Abadan. Two days later, in the same area, she sank another Norwegian tanker, the *Ferncastle* (9,940 tons) also bound to the Persian Gulf from Esperance.<sup>6</sup>

In July the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, Admiral Somerville, outlined to the Admiralty the position regarding escorts in the Indian Ocean. These were short of requirements, a condition entailing the reduction to a dangerous degree of escorts for Persian Gulf and Indian coastal convoys. The South African submarine campaign had denuded the Eastern Fleet of all available destroyers and many escort vessels. Of the Australian ships, *Norman* (Commander Buchanan<sup>7</sup>), *Quiberon*, and *Quickmatch* were detached to the South Atlantic Station throughout June, July and August, as was *Nizam* in June and July. (In August *Norman* and *Quiberon* made a brief entry into the Atlantic when a convoy escort mission took them up to the Congo River entrance). While on the South Atlantic Station in June *Nizam* for some days took part in a search for a suspected U-boat supply ship some 300 miles south of Madagascar, but without success. While she was so employed the American ship *Sebastian Cermeno* (7,194 tons) was torpedoed and sunk by a U-boat about 300 miles to the north-eastward. Some days later, on 13th July, *Nizam* sighted one of the American ship's lifeboats 1,250 miles from where she was sunk, and rescued from it thirteen survivors, all of whom were "in good condition owing, among other things, to the excellent appointments of the American lifeboats". *Nizam* took this one in tow, and delivered it that evening at Durban. On 29th July the British *Cornish City* (4,952 tons) was sunk by a U-boat with the loss of 32 lives in the area of the American ship's sinking. Just before dawn on the 31st, *Nizam* picked up six survivors from *Cornish City*, who were floating on two rafts—somewhat of a contrast to the "excellent appointments" enjoyed by the survivors of *Sebastian Cermeno*. *Nizam* took them to Mauritius, whence she sailed on 1st August for Australia. On the 18th of the month she arrived at Melbourne for refit.

During the first half of 1943 four of the Australian corvettes on the East Indies Station—*Burnie*, *Cairns*, *Toowoomba* and *Wollongong*—were also mainly employed in the western Indian Ocean attached to the East

<sup>6</sup> *Michel* a few days later set course well south of Australia and New Zealand into the Pacific, keeping in high latitudes until off the coast of Chile. On 11th September 1943 she sank another tanker, *India* (9,549 tons), off Easter Island. She then made for Japan and on 17th October was sunk, just south of Yokohama, by the American submarine *Tarpon*. *Michel* thus closed a long and active career in which she sank 17 ships aggregating 121,994 tons. Her sinking closed the story of the German surface raiders of the Second World War, of which she was the last. (Roskill, *The War At Sea*, Vol II, pp. 411-12.)

<sup>7</sup> Buchanan relieved Burrell in command of *Norman* on 23rd June 1943. Burrell went to Navy Office, Melbourne, as Director of Plans.

African Patrol Flotilla, and operating in the area from Madagascar in the south to Aden in the north. The other nine were operated by the Flag Officer, Ceylon, *Lismore* and *Gawler* with the Ceylon Escort group, and the remainder with the Arabian-Bengal-Ceylon Force, with Persian Gulf convoys. The four ships with the East African Patrol Flotilla were withdrawn from there about the middle of the year, *Burnie* and *Toowoomba* to strengthen the Persian Gulf defences in the Hormuz Group—which was operated by S.N.O.P.G., and which had been weakened by the absence of a number of ships refitting—and *Cairns* and *Wollongong* in answer to another call which was further to strain the escort resources of Admiral Somerville.

In his outline of escort requirements submitted to the Admiralty in July, Admiral Somerville remarked that the opening of the Mediterranean would increase the importance and volume of the Aden, Bombay and Colombo traffic to an extent which would require escort throughout its passage. This opening of the Middle Sea took place in May 1943 and, at the time of his statement to the Admiralty, Somerville had lost a proportion of his valuable escort force—including eight of the Australian corvettes—to help to meet the escort requirements there.

In the Mediterranean, as in the other theatres in this global war, the issue was decided by communications, and the inability of the Axis powers to supply their armies in North Africa resulted in their utter defeat, while Allied control of communications opened the way for the trans-Mediterranean invasion of Europe. At a conference with Doenitz and his army and air chiefs on 14th March Hitler emphasised the importance of Tunisia and its dependence on supplies, of which an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 tons a month were needed for the nurture of the Axis forces there. Shortage of ships, both carrying and escort, was the problem. "It is impossible," the Fuehrer told his audience, "to supply armies by air. A single 9,000-ton steamer, for example, can carry as much on one voyage as a whole air fleet can carry over a longer period of time. Protection of convoys by the Air Force *alone* is not possible; ships continue to be required." As a result of the conference, Doenitz was sent to Italy to present to Mussolini and the Italian Naval Staff "the alternative of either making an all-out effort to get through supplies regardless of personnel considerations, or to lose Tunisia, and with that also Italy".<sup>8</sup>

The German admiral reported back to Hitler four days later. The Italian naval staff showed a note "of restraint and disapproval" towards German suggestions. But six Italian torpedo boats were handed over, and Mussolini stressed his intention of committing the entire Italian fleet in case of an Anglo-Saxon landing on Sardinia. This promised all-out naval effort did not materialise, however, and Allied sea and air attacks continued to whittle away Axis shipping resources. The battle for Tunisia opened in November 1942, when British troops from Algeria crossed the frontier.

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<sup>8</sup> *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1943.

In that month the battle for North Africa brought great events in its train—the relief of Malta; the secession from Vichy to the Allies of Dakar and French West Africa with, later on, the battleship *Richelieu* and three cruisers; the French thwarting—by scuttling the ships—of a German attempt to seize the Toulon fleet. For some weeks Tunisia hung fire. Hitler reacted strongly to the invasion from the west, and hurriedly reinforced by air “to make Tunisia an impregnable outer bastion for Italy and a stronghold for all the Axis forces in Africa”.<sup>9</sup> By Christmas 1942 there were 50,000 Axis troops in the peninsula (the figure was to rise to approximately a quarter of a million before the end), and a stalemate developed there. But the successes of the Eighth Army driving from the east changed the picture, which had largely been conditioned by Allied supply difficulties resulting from enemy air attacks on Algiers and Bone, and lack of rail and road transport thence to the troops in the field. Tripoli fell to the Eighth Army on 23rd January 1943, and the first supply ship entered the harbour on 2nd February, two days before the Eighth Army crossed the frontier into Tunisia.

(On the day that the first supply ship entered Tripoli, 2nd February, occurred another event of significance. The last remnants of the German Army of twenty-two divisions under Field Marshal von Paulus, beleaguered before Stalingrad, surrendered. “This crushing disaster to the German arms,” recorded Mr Churchill, “ended Hitler’s prodigious effort to conquer Russia by force of arms, and destroy Communism by an equally odious form of totalitarian tyranny.”<sup>1</sup>)

A week after its capture, Tripoli was handling 2,000 tons a day, and by the 24th of the month the figure had “mounted magnificently”, with the joint tonnages of Tripoli and Benghazi reaching up to 6,000 tons a day, and Churchill telegraphed to Tripoli’s Port Commandant: “Tell them they are unloading history.” To the growing flow of Allied supplies was added a lessening of those of the Axis as an increasingly tight blockade was instituted by Allied submarines, surface ships and aircraft.<sup>2</sup> Tunisia and Bizerta fell—the first named to British, the other to American forces—on 7th May. At 7.52 a.m. on the 12th all organised enemy resistance in North Africa ceased, and next day General Alexander (who took over the Allied command in Tunisia in February) reported to the British Prime Minister that the Tunisian campaign was over. Four days later the first through convoy since 1941 left Gibraltar. It reached Alexandria without loss on 26th May.

The reopening of the Mediterranean blessed the Allies with an immense saving in shipping. Store ships from the United Kingdom for the supply

<sup>9</sup> Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide*, p. 533.

<sup>1</sup> Churchill, Vol IV, p. 638.

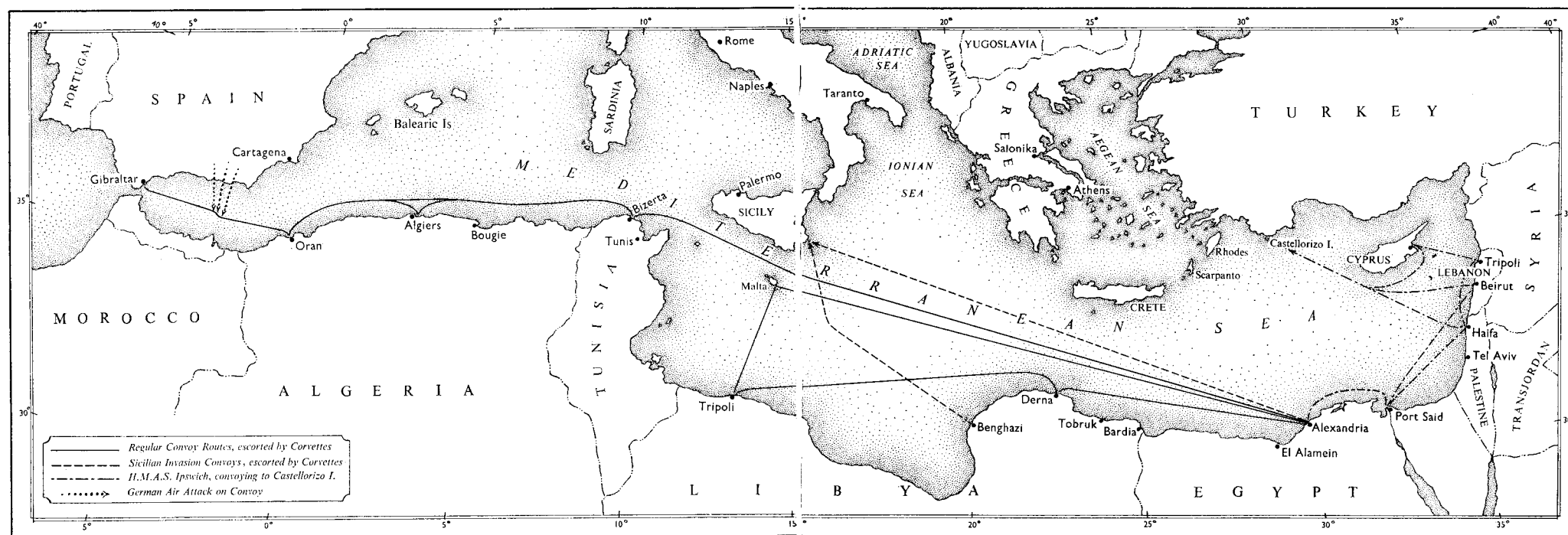
<sup>2</sup> Allied submarines and surface ships sank 89 Axis transport ships of 268,000 tons, and aircraft destroyed an additional 48 ships of 164,800 tons during the Tunisian campaign. This was 32 per cent of the estimated shipping initially available to the Axis at the beginning of the campaign. On the other hand, over the whole mass of Allied shipping which entered the Mediterranean between 8th November 1942 and 8th May 1943, losses were less than 2½ per cent.

Mr Churchill to Admiral Cunningham, 11th June 1943. Quoted in Churchill, Vol IV, pp. 696-7.

of armies in the Middle East had for three years to travel a minimum distance of about 12,400 miles. By the new route through the Mediterranean this was reduced to about 3,400 miles. At a "Fuehrer Conference" on 14th May 1943, Doenitz observed that the Allies had gained two million tons of shipping space since the Mediterranean was cleared. Hitler: "Which our trusty submarines will now have to sink." Doenitz: "Yet we are at present facing the greatest crisis in submarine warfare, since the

June the battleship and cruisers left the Mediterranean through the Suez Canal for Mombasa and French West Africa. The three destroyers and the submarine proceeded westward through the Mediterranean for Oran and Casablanca.<sup>3</sup>

On 26th May, the day that the first through convoy reached Alexandria, there was formed in that port the 21st Minesweeping Flotilla, comprising the Australian corvettes *Gawler* (Senior Officer),<sup>4</sup> *Ipswich*, *Lismore* (Lieut-



Australian corvettes in the Mediterranean, May-October 1943

enemy, by means of new location devices, for the first time makes fighting impossible and is causing us heavy losses—15 to 17 submarines per month."

On the day that the first through convoy sailed from Gibraltar the Commander-in-Chief, Levant, Admiral Sir Ralph Leatham, received an official letter from Vice-Admiral Godfroy, commanding the French squadron in Alexandria (consisting of one battleship, four cruisers, three destroyers and a submarine, which had been lying in the harbour since 2nd July 1940) giving his decision to rejoin the French Navy in North Africa. Godfroy's decision ended a long and trying period of perplexed loyalties and inactivity for the French admiral and his ships' companies. Reinforcements for his crews were sent from North Africa, and late in

tenant Lever,<sup>5</sup> who succeeded Crawford in command on 15th February 1943), and *Maryborough* (Lieutenant Boyle<sup>6</sup>). The four ships entered the Mediterranean on 15th May, anticipating by a few days the arrival there of their four sisters—*Geraldton* (Lieut-Commander Harris), Senior Officer, *Cessnock*, *Cairns* and *Wollongong*, which were formed into the

<sup>3</sup> The French ships were: battleship *Lorraine*; cruisers *Tourville*, *Suffren*, *Duguay-Trouin* and *Duquesne*; destroyers *Le Fortune*, *Forbin* and *Basque*; and submarine *Protée*.

<sup>4</sup> *Maryborough* was Senior Officer of 21st Minesweeping Flotilla until 21st May 1943, on which date Commander Cant left that ship—under the command of Lieutenant Boyle—to return to Australia to become CO *Platypus* and Deputy NOIC Cairns. Seymour, CO of *Gawler*, thus became Senior Officer of the group.

<sup>5</sup> Lt L. C. G. Lever, RANR. Comd HMAS *Lismore* 1943-45. Ship's officer; of Manly, NSW; b. Singapore, 14 Sep 1909. Died 7 May 1963.

<sup>6</sup> Lt-Cdr J. C. P. Boyle, RANR. HMAS *Deloraine*; comd HMAS *Maryborough* 1943-45. Sea pilot; of Bondi, NSW; b. Rockhampton, Qld, 31 Mar 1913.

22nd Minesweeping Flotilla, with the first-named as Senior Officer. For some weeks the eight ships were to represent the R.A.N. in the Middle Sea, and to play a part in the developments there leading up to the invasion of southern Europe.

Their reception, both socially and climatically, was a warm one. At Aden, where *Gawler*, *Maryborough* and *Lismore* arrived on 3rd May, Seymour remarked in *Gawler's* Letter of Proceedings that "great kindness was shown to the group by the naval authorities". But at Suez the warmth of the local rear-admiral's welcome was eclipsed by that of the weather. "No leave allowed by Rear-Admiral, Suez," recorded Seymour, "on account of ships' companies not possessing white tropical rig." (That of the R.A.N. was khaki.) This matter was satisfactorily resolved when the ships reached the Mediterranean, where they were operated by Commodore (D) Levant, who was, apparently, less colour conscious than his Suez colleague. Seymour called on him when the ships reached Alexandria, and later remarked: "Mentioned subject of khaki tropical rig to Commodore (D) who expressed his complete approval. No further trouble in that regard."

The ships' early weeks in the Mediterranean were spent in escort duties for which they were individually attached temporarily to existing escort groups—for instance *Ipswich* to the 1st Escort Group, *Gawler* and *Lismore* to the 2nd Escort Group, and *Maryborough* to the 3rd Escort Group. Later, though still escorting, they were attached as flotillas to escort groups. As members of the 2nd Escort Group *Gawler* and *Lismore* became involved in the preparations for the departure of the French squadron from Alexandria when the group escorted convoy "GTX2",<sup>7</sup> which was attacked by a U-boat in the morning of 17th June about 35 miles north-west of Derna. The British *Yoma* (8,139 tons) was sunk. Of her 1,670 Service passengers, 665 were the second flight of reinforcements for the French ships. *Gawler*, *Lismore* and two motor minesweepers picked up 1,353 survivors and landed them at Derna.

As stated earlier, it was decided at the Casablanca Conference in January, that the immediate target after the final defeat of the enemy in North Africa should be Sicily, and plans were pushed forward for operation HUSKY, as the Sicilian invasion was designated. It presented, as Mr Churchill subsequently remarked, "new and formidable problems".<sup>8</sup> They included possible intervention by the Italian Fleet, which still possessed a powerful battle fleet; possible desperate fighting by the Italian Army, stiffened by German air and ground forces; and disagreement between

<sup>7</sup> With the reopening of the Mediterranean to through traffic, a series of intermediate convoys (GTX eastbound, XTG westbound) was instituted. They sailed every 15 days and were interspersed by the main convoys, KMS from the United Kingdom and UGS from the United States. The program for June included four through convoys—the combined "KMS15-UGS8a" which left Gibraltar on 2nd June; "GTX2" on 8th June; combined "KMS16-UGS9" on 16th June; and "GTX3" on 23rd June. "KMS15-UGS8a" was the largest convoy of the war to date. It comprised 129 merchant ships and 19 escort vessels, covered an area of over 65 square miles, and suffered no loss or damage on passage. Dropping various sections at ports en route, its final portion of 28 ships arrived at Tripoli on 8th June.

<sup>8</sup> Churchill, Vol V, p. 23.

British and American staffs on strategical and tactical grounds. The American Chiefs of Staff had never wholly accepted the Casablanca decisions, and the advocates of all-out effort against Japan at the expense of the war against Germany carried much weight. A decision on the move after Sicily was urgent. Late in April Churchill arranged with President Roosevelt again to visit him in Washington, and from 11th to 26th May, Prime Minister, President and their advisers conferred in the American capital in the conference known as "Trident". From "Trident" emerged an "Overall Strategic Concept for the Prosecution of the War" which reaffirmed the decision "to bring about at the earliest possible date the unconditional surrender of the Axis in Europe" while maintaining and extending "unremitting pressure against Japan with the purpose of continually reducing her military power and attaining positions from which her ultimate surrender can be forced".

The British were, however, unable to get a recommendation from the Combined Chiefs of Staff that HUSKY should be followed by an invasion of Italy. Instead was a resolution that Eisenhower be instructed to plan such operations in exploitation of HUSKY as would be best calculated to eliminate Italy from the war. The final decision would be by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. In this connection there was a strong American feeling that Sardinia should be the objective after Sicily; and Eisenhower considered that Sicily should be the immediate post-Tunisia objective only if the purpose was to clear the Mediterranean through route. If the purpose was to invade Italy, the initial objectives should be Sardinia and Corsica. The view that Sardinia would be the Allied objective was held by Hitler, who believed—partly on the evidence of an Allied order which was discovered in the second week in May—that their post-Tunisia targets would be Sardinia and the Peloponnese. The Italian Admiralty also believed that Sardinia would be the first objective, with Sicily later. Mussolini thought that Sicily would be the immediate target. In any case Doenitz realised that communications were the crux of the matter, and in discussions with the Italian naval authorities during a second visit he made to Rome from 12th to 15th May, he emphasised that *everything* must be concentrated on supplies.

Discussing the question with General Ambrosio, Chief of the Italian General Staff, Doenitz explained that

at the moment the chief weakness in the defence of the large Italian islands is a lack of reinforcements and supplies. No time should be lost in sending these because the enemy is constantly increasing pressure on our supply lines. Once the enemy has undertaken an operation, pressure at unloading points may be expected to be particularly heavy. . . . After establishing numerous unloading stations, it may very well be that submarines, cruisers, and other vessels will be pressed into service in order to complete the transportation of men and supplies as quickly as possible. It is more important for the Navy to supply *transport* than to engage the enemy in battle. General Ambrosio did not fully agree with the above; he felt that submarines and cruisers should fight.

[Doenitz] replied that naval forces have already ceased fighting. When the serious



need for transport is compared with what may be gained by engaging the enemy, the former takes precedence.<sup>9</sup>

The Allies, too, had their communications problems in planning HUSKY, and it was realised that the early capture of ports and airfields to maintain the armies after landing on Sicily was essential. Messina, the island's best port, was beyond initial reach, and the need to narrow the point of attack limited early supply channels to the smaller ports of Syracuse, Augusta and Licata—and the open beaches. Fortunately the new amphibious load-carrier, the D.U.K.W., was available for open beach work, as were L.S.T.'s,<sup>1</sup> which filled a vital role.

Preliminary to HUSKY, the subjugation of the island of Pantellaria, lying almost midway in the Sicilian Channel, some 150 miles W.N.W. of Malta, was effected without difficulty on 11th June, after air and surface bombardment, "white flags", recorded Admiral Cunningham, "being hoisted as the troops started to move shorewards in their landing craft".<sup>2</sup> Within 24 hours the smaller islands of Linosa and Lampedusa, to the west and W.S.W. respectively of Malta, also surrendered. Preparations went ahead for the assault on Sicily in July.

Throughout June the Australian corvettes continued their escort work. With the First Escort Group *Ipswich*, on 21st June, was in Tripoli when His Majesty the King visited the port and, as did all the ships of the escort, *Ipswich* contributed one officer and 10 ratings to the guard of honour formed by the Group, all the commanding officers of which were presented to King George.

Meanwhile planning for HUSKY continued, with preparations for convoys of ships and landing craft from widely spaced points—Suez, Tunisia, Algiers, Malta, Oran, Britain, and the United States. To cover against any possible attempted intervention by the Italian Fleet, British naval forces were strengthened to include aircraft carriers *Indomitable* and *Formidable*; battleships *Howe*,<sup>3</sup> *King George V*, *Nelson*, *Rodney*, *Warspite* and *Valiant*; ten cruisers and destroyers. D-day was set for 10th July, with the first troops landing at 2.45 a.m. For some days beforehand the airfields and defences of the island were heavily bombed.

On 5th July *Ipswich* sailed from Tobruk as part escort of a tanker. Late that night she was detached to enter Benghazi, where she joined her fellows of the 21st Minesweeping Flotilla, *Gawler*, *Lismore* and *Maryborough*. The four ships sailed from Benghazi that evening, and at dawn next morning joined one of the invasion convoys, "MWS36", in company with nine other escorts comprising five British, two Indian, one Dutch, and one Greek, with H.M.I.S. *Sutlej* as Senior Officer. These were anxious

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<sup>9</sup> *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1943.

<sup>1</sup> "This type of vessel had first been conceived and developed in Britain in 1940. A new design, based on British experience, was thereafter built in large numbers in the United States, and was first used in Sicily. It became the foundation of all our future amphibious operations, and was often their limiting factor." Churchill, Vol V, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 543.

<sup>3</sup> HMS *Howe*, battleship (1942), 35,000 tons, ten 14-in and sixteen 5.25-in guns, 30 kts.

days for those in charge of HUSKY. The weather was a vital factor, and on 9th July, when the converging convoys assembled in their positions to the east and south of Malta, it came on to blow hard from the north-westward, and Seymour, in his "Letter of Proceedings", noted that "a good deal of sympathy was felt for all the soldiers in transports and landing craft". The landing craft flotillas had sailed that afternoon from Malta, and Admiral Cunningham later recalled:

Our anxieties were not at all relieved as we watched them literally burying themselves, with the spray flying over them in solid sheets, as they plunged out to sea on their way to their assault positions.<sup>4</sup>

But the weather, which was not bad enough to stop the operation (though it hampered it, and caused casualties among those taking part in the air-borne attack) was bad enough to help it by lulling the defenders—who for weeks had been on the alert—into a belief that no landings would be attempted under such conditions. Thus initial opposition was not heavy.

The four Australian ships were with the slower store ships of the convoy, whose fast troopships with their battle-hardened Eighth Army passengers went on ahead to keep the landing appointment at 2.30 a.m. on the 10th. Just after midnight on the 9th one of the ships under their charge was seen to have stopped, and *Gawler* closed her, to find

that two of her landing craft carried on board had taken charge. Stood by her until landing craft were secured at 0300 and then made "Follow Father". Several aircraft flares were observed during this period. Weather moderated rapidly. Slightly concerned at daylight to observe that the ship "following Father" was the *G. R. Clarke*, carrying the Commodore of the convoy. Escorted him to his disembarkation point two hours late, and proceeded on A/S patrol.

Meanwhile *Ipswich*, *Maryborough* and *Lismore*, with their charges, reached the release position "Bark East", on Sicily's east coast between Cape Passero and Syracuse, at 6 a.m. on the 10th, by which time the weather had fined to a "beautiful" morning. All day the four ships (*Gawler* having rejoined) carried out mine sweeps and anti-submarine patrols. The whole day there were continual air-raid warnings; "we saw various planes being shot down, and the firing going on all along the beaches", *Ipswich*'s commanding officer, McBryde, later recalled, until they sailed at 2 a.m. on the 11th for Malta, whence they sailed with empty troopships for Alexandria and Port Said.

It was while *Ipswich* and her companions were on passage from Malta to Alexandria that the other four Australian ships—*Geraldton*, *Cairns*, *Wollongong* and *Cessnock*—had their visit to Sicily as part escort of a 36-ship convoy from Alexandria. They spent 13th July carrying out an endless chain patrol off the beach, and saw an American Liberty ship blown up in an air raid. The other four were back off Syracuse again on 24th and 25th July. They left Alexandria on the 18th as part escort—the escort, with H.M.S. *Shoreham* as Senior Officer, was of ten ships most

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<sup>4</sup> Cunningham, p. 550.

of the time—of convoy “MWS38” for Augusta and Syracuse, where they arrived in the late afternoon of the 24th. McBryde later told how

when we arrived there the ships all went into the two ports and we remained on continuous A/S patrol outside Syracuse. We had a quiet time until four o'clock in the morning. Then the enemy came over in full force and we had a solid attack. They bombed Syracuse, and us, and all the ships outside. The attack lasted more than an hour. It was a very spectacular show, flares and oerlikon tracer everywhere, and I think nearly all the ships had near misses that night. We got a lot of bombs between *Lismore* and ourselves. The four of us were together. Bombing from about 2,000 feet. I think we had either two or three between *Lismore* and ourselves, the nearest about 100 yards. One less than 100 yards on the port beam did not go off. We got one aircraft. They dropped a lot of flares which showed them up nicely. *Lismore* had been firing at the aircraft and they lost sight of them or something but we opened up on them and got one very quickly. I was watching through the glasses and could see the tracer go into her—a shower of sparks, she caught fire, and went down in flames, crashing about a mile on our port beam in the water like a big ball of fire.

Seymour, reporting on this air raid in *Gawler's* Letter of Proceedings, remarked that “a bomb having been observed falling close to *Maryborough* a signal was made at daylight and a reply was received: No damage except to my underpants.”

Ratings also had their say—in letters home which were read by the censor. One in *Maryborough* told his folk about the air attack:

Well! The boys didn't mind it. They know we are one of the first Aussie corvette minesweepers to be in the second front invasion, and are sure glad to have been able to take part in it.

Giving his version from *Gawler*, another wrote to his mother:

Our job as Tels. is not much. Imagine a hell of an uproar going on outside and two sparkers sitting in the office trying to read morse and letting their imagination run riot. . . . Once when a string of four lobbed near us, two on the starboard side, one to port and one astern, I looked up at the cobbler and said ‘Oh dear!’, well, something a lot stronger than that. I was relieved for a while so that I could get outside and have a look round. What a sight—it looked as if millions of stars were lighting up the sky. These were ack-ack shell bursts. As soon as a parachute flare lit up it was shot down. In the five minutes I was outside I saw four Junkers 88's pipped, and to be honest I really felt sorry for the poor devils in them. . . . Later in the morning we were at one time that close that we could see the commandos moving at the double around and into the civvies' houses. It must have been a terrible surprise for the people there—just imagine one morning waking up and finding a couple of thousand enemy ships anchored less than a mile from the shore—wouldn't it! . . . Believe it or not I have started praying again—like I used to as a kid—makes me feel a bit better especially when things are getting tough.

After this Sicilian interlude the two groups of corvettes went on the Alexandria-Gibraltar convoy run, and were variously employed on escort work for the rest of their stay in the Mediterranean. On occasions the two groups were within earshot if not within sight of each other. Such an occasion was on 13th August when *Geraldton*, *Cairns*, *Cessnock* and *Wollongong*, with the R.N. corvettes *Convolvulus*, *Saxifrage*, *Godetia*,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> HMS's *Convolvulus*, *Saxifrage* and *Godetia*, corvettes (1940-41), 925 tons, one 4-in AA gun, 16 kts.

and the destroyer *Blankney*,<sup>6</sup> were escorting the east-bound convoy "UGS13" of 75 ships just east of the Strait of Gibraltar. Around 9 p.m. they heard gunfire and saw flashes to the northward which were the oral and visual evidence of a "sore head" a west-bound convoy was administering to the German Air Force which, as subsequent information suggested, had intended inflicting just such a punishment on the east-bound "UGS13", but had picked the wrong victim.

On 3rd August *Gawler*, *Ipswich*, *Lismore* and *Maryborough*, with their R.N. colleagues *Shoreham* (Senior Officer), *Whitehaven*, *Hythe*, *Rye* and *Romney*,<sup>7</sup> sailed from Alexandria escorting convoy "MKS21" for Gibraltar. There were joiners and leavers on passage, and calls were made at Bizerta and Oran for fuel. Friday, 13th August, was apparently a good sailing day for ships other than *Shropshire* (who, it will be recalled, sailed from Scapa Flow for Australia on that date) for it was that morning when "MKS21", now of 40 large merchant ships, sailed from Oran on the last lap of the run to Gibraltar, a stage on which no air cover was provided. By evening the convoy was passing Alboran Island, lying midway in the eastern approaches to the Straits, 120 miles from Gibraltar. The Spanish coast loomed to the northward. A fine autumn day was closing with a clear sunset, and the likelihood of attack seemed remote. But just before the sun dipped below the horizon around 8.45 p.m., a number of large aircraft (variously estimated at between 40 and 50) were seen silhouetted against the Spanish coastline "in the direction of Almeria".<sup>8</sup> When first sighted—as was later recorded by McBryde in *Ipswich*, who was on the extreme starboard wing of the escorts in position ahead of the convoy—

they seemed to be making no attempt to come in, but were circling and gliding back and forth just above the surface like a flock of large evil birds. It was a minute or two before they formed up and came in to the attack; we were quite ready and waiting for them.

So were the rest of the ships, both escorts and convoy, and the result was such a barrage of anti-aircraft fire, and skilful handling of the convoy, that the enemy suffered far more than he gave. The main body of aircraft, some 35 Heinkel 111 torpedo bombers flying 30 or 40 feet above the water, attacked from the starboard bow, most of them passing between *Whitehaven* and *Ipswich*, who was the first ship to open fire. McBryde recalled how

the stubborn defence by the escort broke the enemy formation, and as they passed our beam the convoy commenced to take part in the action. At this stage things began to happen, and I counted seven planes crashing, all in flames. The remainder of the enemy force, about a dozen Junkers 88's, attacked from the port quarter where the *Maryborough* bore the brunt and shot down one with a direct hit from her four-inch. On the approach of the larger attacking force the Commodore of

<sup>6</sup> HMS *Blankney*, destroyer (1940), 1,025 tons, six 4-in AA and two 20-mm AA guns, 27 kts.

<sup>7</sup> HMS's *Whitehaven*, *Hythe*, *Rye* and *Romney*, corvettes (1940-41), 656 tons, one 3-in AA and two 20-mm AA guns, 16 kts. *Hythe* sunk off Bougie, Algeria, 11 Oct 1943.

<sup>8</sup> It was later stated by German airmen shot down and rescued by ships of the convoy, that the aircraft had flown from Montpellier, in southern France.

the convoy turned his ships to meet them bows on and put up a very heavy barrage. Hundreds of smoke floats were burned and thrown overboard resulting in a scene of apparent devastation and havoc. In fact I thought half the convoy had gone.

Actually only two ships—both of the convoy—were torpedoed, and neither was lost. They were towed safely to Gibraltar by the R.N. escorts *Hythe* and *Rye*. In all, casualties in the ships of the convoy totalled eight wounded by machine-gun fire. *Gawler* was the only escort vessel with a casualty, one rating getting a machine-gun bullet through the thigh. The German aircraft suffered heavily. At least nine were shot down, and others probably never got home. The “scene of apparent devastation and havoc” caused by the smoke floats, which at the time led McBryde astray, seemingly deceived the enemy airmen also. A German news broadcast on 14th August claimed that “continued reconnaissance confirmed that at least 170,000 gross registered tons” of the convoy had been sunk or “devastatingly hit”, and described how

after the attack, which was carried out in several waves, the sea was covered with wrecks of burning ships; thick black clouds of smoke lay over the burning tanker and everywhere numerous life boats were to be seen. A number of ships which had been hit sank after heavy explosions, and large patches of oil covered the water.

It is of interest that this German news broadcast described the attack as directed “east of Gibraltar against a large convoy entering the Mediterranean . . . the convoy consisting of 70 ships . . . fully laden and with the Sicilian theatre of war as their destination”. From this, it would seem, as remarked above, that the Germans thought that their target was the east-bound “UGS13”. In a congratulatory signal to *Shoreham* after the attack Sir Andrew Cunningham, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, said: “I congratulate you and the escort force and convoy ‘MKS21’ on your sturdy defence of convoy against heavy torpedo bomber attacks. The enemy got a sore head that he is likely to remember.” Two other signals are worthy of recording. Some of the shot-down enemy airmen were rescued by ships of the convoy, and Seymour recorded in *Gawler’s* report how

After the attack, one of the convoy signalled to the nearest escort, H.M.S. *Whitehaven*: “I have two German survivors and should like to dispose of them. Request advice.” *Whitehaven* replied “Approved”.

### III

While convoy “MKS21” was surviving its air attack on 13th August, other widely separated events presaged future determining developments. From not so far distant Sicily, the defenders were withdrawing across the Strait of Messina, for this was the eve of the Allied subjugation of the island. This impending fall of Italy’s southern bastion produced, ten days earlier, the first peace overtures from the Badoglio Government which, on 25th July, replaced Mussolini in Italy. Across the Atlantic in Quebec, Churchill and Roosevelt were meeting with their advisers at the Quadrant

Conference. From this came far-reaching decisions. They included, in the more distant view, operation OVERLORD, the Allied invasion of Europe across the English Channel from Britain, target date May 1944; the appointment of Vice-Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten as Supreme Commander of the South-East Asia front and the vesting in the British Chiefs of Staff of operational control there; in the "overall strategic concept" of the Far Eastern War, the defeat of Japan within twelve months after the collapse of Germany; and Britain's "full and fair" place in the war against Japan from the moment when Germany was defeated. In the immediate future and nearer home, Prime Minister and President accepted "with alacrity" Eisenhower's plan—adopted and recommended by the Combined Chiefs of Staff—to begin the assault on Italy in early September by an attack across the Strait of Messina, with subsidiary attacks on the Calabrian coast as a prelude to a major landing in the Gulf of Salerno, south of Naples, aimed at the capture of that city and port. In the near east, in Russia, a heavy German defeat at Kursk in July heralded Russian victories at Orel and Kharkov which, within the space of two months, threw the invaders into retreat along the whole southern front from Viazma, opposite Moscow, to the Black Sea. Smolensk fell to the Russians on 25th September; they crossed the Dnieper by early October; Dnepropetrovsk was in their hands on the 25th of the month, and Kiev on 6th November. By December the defeated Germans in central and southern Russia had been thrown back some 200 miles and, now denied the defences of the Dnieper River line, "lay open and vulnerable to a winter campaign in which, as they knew from bitter experience, their opponents excelled".<sup>9</sup>

In the Far East the Americans in the Solomons initiated the first of the "bypassing" movements which were to become a feature of the war against the Japanese, by seizing Vella Lavella—north-west of Kolombangara across Vella Gulf—and isolating Kolombangara and its Japanese garrison and Vila airfield. On Vella Lavella were some 1,100 Japanese and the two coastwatchers, Josselyn and Firth, whose contribution towards the capture of the island was considerable. They guided a mixed United States Army, Navy, and Marine Corps reconnaissance party which landed on Vella Lavella by canoes on 21st July and for a week surveyed the island. Josselyn selected the spot where, on 12th August, the first of the invaders landed unopposed. At dawn on the 15th the main American force landed at Barakoma, and secured the south-east point of the island. Within the perimeter established, a coastwatcher station was set up manned by "reinforcements" sent in to Josselyn.<sup>1</sup> The task of cleaning up the enemy on the island began. Meanwhile, in near-by New Guinea, where the Japanese were being thrust slowly north-westwards towards Lae and Salamaua, Allied preparations for the capture of those two enemy points were maturing.

<sup>9</sup> Churchill, Vol V, pp. 229-31.

<sup>1</sup> They were Lt R. J. Harlow, RNVR; F-O C. F. Hooper, RAAF; Ldg Writer K. J. Mungoven, RAN; Cpl J. Cunningham, US Army; and three ratings. In October Hooper was withdrawn sick, his place being taken by F-O E. Spencer, RAAF.

Events in Italy had followed swiftly on the Allied landings in Sicily on 10th July. At a meeting of Hitler and his navy and army chiefs on the 17th of the month, Admiral Doenitz expressed his views regarding the situation in Italy which were "generally speaking . . . the same as those submitted by Lieut-General Jodl in written form". They were to the effect that the breaking of the spirit of the Italian Army which resulted from the Allied victory in Tunisia, had been followed by the shattering of that of the navy as a result of the invasion of Sicily. Doenitz declared that

the attitude of the High Command in the employment of the Italian Fleet at the present time is infamous. In spite of all his efforts he was unable to get Admiral Riccardi to use his light forces to drive the enemy from the Straits of Messina, an intolerable situation since he has the forces available to do so.

No action resulted from this meeting, and meanwhile came the dramatic change in the Italian Government. For some months there had been growing in higher Italian military and Court circles covert opposition to Mussolini and the Fascist regime, and by mid-year a plan was made between the King, General Ambrosio, and Marshal Badoglio, for the arrest of the Italian leader. There was unrest within the Fascist Party also, where the Fascist Old Guard, who sought a revival of the party and the lessening of Mussolini's power, induced him to convene a formal session of the Fascist Grand Council, at which, on 24th July, a resolution calling upon the Crown to assume more power and the King to accept his responsibilities was carried by a large majority. Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law, voted for the resolution. Next day Mussolini called on the King, who told him that the Grand Council's vote showed that he, Mussolini, was the most hated man in Italy:

You have one friend left, and I am he. That is why I tell you that you need have no fears for your personal safety, for which I will ensure protection. I have been thinking that the man for the job now is Marshal Badoglio.<sup>2</sup>

When he left the King, Mussolini was arrested, and two days later was interned on the island of Ponza (one of the Pontine Islands, 60 miles west of Naples) by the order of Badoglio, who had been charged by the King to form a Cabinet of Service chiefs and civil servants.

These were days of anxiety and division at German headquarters. Hitler refused to accept the situation brought about by the fall of Mussolini. He believed that Fascism could be revived, and Mussolini used as a puppet dictator. This view was supported by Goering and Ribbentrop. Kesselring and Jodl opposed any action against the Badoglio Government. Doenitz—whose opinion was backed by Field Marshals Rommel and Richthofen, and by Vice-Admiral Ruge, Director of the German staff attached to Supermarina, the Italian high naval command—doubted whether Fascism still meant anything to the Italian people, and whether the Badoglio Government would keep on fighting. "We must forestall by all means any surprise action by the Anglo-Saxons. All will depend on correct timing

<sup>2</sup> Mussolini, *Memoirs 1942-43*, quoted in Churchill, Vol V, p. 47.

of any contemplated action against the present Italian Government." Hitler insisted that the Fascist Party was the only one willing to fight at Germany's side. "We must therefore restore it. . . . These are matters which a soldier cannot comprehend. Only a man with political insight can see his way clear." As to Sicily, where the Allies progressed swiftly, there were similar differences. Jodl and Kesselring proposed to withdraw from the island and retire up the Italian peninsula to a more easily held position. Doenitz and Rommel were for holding on. Doenitz protested that

we are engaging considerable forces of the enemy in Sicily. If we withdraw, these forces and material will be released and become available for new landings. This ever-present danger is increased through the uncertainty of knowing where such landings will be made. The best means of preventing such new operations is by tying up the enemy forces in Sicily.

Hitler could not make up his mind, and the matter was decided on 16th August when the Allies entered Messina. Next day General Alexander telegraphed to Churchill, then in Quebec: "By 10 a.m. this morning, August 17, 1943, the last German soldier was flung out of Sicily, and the whole island is now in our hands."

By this time peace overtures, initiated by the Italian Badoglio Government on 3rd August, had made some progress, and in Sicily on 3rd September, "in an olive grove near Syracuse", an armistice was signed. Before dawn on that day the British Eighth Army crossed the Strait of Messina to enter the Italian mainland. By arrangement between the Allies and the Italian Government, the signing of the armistice was not made public until 6.30 p.m. on 8th September, on which day was to be effected the complete surrender of the whole of the Italian armed forces. With the announcement, the main units of the Italian Fleet left Spezia and Genoa for North Africa. Next day, 9th September, a major Allied assault landing was made at Salerno.

Against all these developments the Germans had made plans. They comprised operation EICHE—the rescue of Mussolini; operation STUDENT, the restoration of Fascism; operation ACHSE—the capture or destruction of the Italian Fleet; and operation SCHWARZ—the seizure of key positions on land. The two last were immediately implemented. The Germans were unable to prevent the fleet leaving its bases, but they attacked with aircraft off the north-west coast of Sardinia and sank the battleship *Roma*<sup>3</sup> with heavy loss of life, including the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Bergami. The battleship *Italia* was damaged, but steamed on with *Vittorio Veneto*, the cruisers and destroyers. They were met next morning, 10th September, by *Warspite*, *Valiant*, and destroyers and escorted to Malta. Meanwhile a force of cruisers<sup>4</sup> and the minelayer *Abdiel* embarked British troops at Bizerta and left there on the evening of the 8th to capture

<sup>3</sup> *Roma*, Italian battleship (1940), 35,000 tons, nine 15-in and twelve 6-in. guns, 30 kts. Sunk off NW coast of Sardinia, 9 Sep 1943.

<sup>4</sup> Of five cruisers comprising this force four—*Aurora*, *Penelope*, *Sirius*, *Dido*—were British. There was one American, *Boise*, who will be remembered as having been one of the few survivors of the first three months of the Far Eastern War in the South-West Pacific. (See *Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942*, p. 534.)



Taranto. Reinforced by the battleships *Howe* (flagship of Vice-Admiral Power<sup>5</sup>) and *King George V*, they reached their objective next day and landed unopposed, though there was heavy loss of life amongst troops carried in *Abdiel* when that ship struck a mine and sank in the harbour. As the invaders approached Taranto they passed the Italian battleships *Andrea Doria* and *Caio Duilio*, two cruisers and a destroyer, all proceeding to Malta to surrender. They reached the British base in the afternoon of the 10th, anticipating by some hours the arrival there of the Spezia and Genoa contingent. On 11th September Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, in Malta, made a signal to the Admiralty: "Be pleased to inform their Lordships that the Italian Battle Fleet now lies at anchor under the guns of the fortress of Malta."

#### IV

It was three years and three months since, on 10th June 1940, in Alexandria,

Dinner was in progress in *Sydney's* wardroom when, about 8 p.m., the mess president tapped for silence and broke the news that an Italian ultimatum declared a state of war against the Allies as from midnight that night.<sup>6</sup>

Then there were six Australian ships in the Mediterranean—*Sydney*, and the five destroyers of the old 10th Flotilla, *Stuart*, *Vendetta*, *Vampire*, *Voyager* and *Waterhen*. They, and those other Australian ships which followed them to the "Middle Sea", fought there through the dark days of Greece and Crete, the "Tobruk Ferry", and Malta's period of trial. Among them they paid a heavy price in ships and men towards the victory now realised. It was fitting that the Royal Australian Navy, whose part in the earlier period of the Mediterranean war had been not inconspicuous, should be represented there by the eight corvettes in this closing triumphal stage, though it is to be regretted that, through force of circumstance, none was present at the surrender of the Italian fleet. On 11th September 1943, the eight ships were scattered from end to end of the Mediterranean on escort duties—*Cessnock*, *Cairns* and *Wollongong* were in Gibraltar and *Gawler* in Port Said, with others intermediately placed—but none at Malta. Before the end of the month most of them were south of the Suez Canal on their way back to the Indian Ocean duties. *Gawler*, *Ipswich* and *Maryborough* alone of the Australian ships remained for a few weeks longer.

The departure of the Italian fleet from its bases coincidental with the announcement of the armistice forestalled the German plan for its capture or destruction. But the other operations were carried out with greater success. With the armistice announcement, German troops began the encirclement of Rome. The Italian Royal Family and Government escaped

<sup>5</sup> Admiral of Fleet Sir Arthur Power, GCB, GBE, CVO; RN. Comd HMS *Ark Royal* 1938-40, 15th Cruiser Sqn 1942; Vice-Adm Malta 1943; Second-in-Comd Eastern Fleet 1944; C-in-C East Indies Station 1945. B. 1889. Died 28 Jan 1960.

<sup>6</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, p. 156.

from the city and by sea to Brindisi, where they arrived on 10th September and set up an anti-Fascist Government. Next day a military truce gave the Germans entry into Rome. On 12th September operation EICHE was successfully completed with Mussolini's "rescue" by German parachutists; and implementation of operation STUDENT was effected with the establishment of a puppet Fascist regime on the shores of Lake Garda, in northern Italy. The country north of Rome was under German military occupation, and a hard road for the Allies lay ahead in fighting their way northwards. As Churchill later wrote: "Italy was now to pass through the most tragic time in her history and to become the battle-ground of some of the fiercest fighting in the war."

As mentioned, *Gawler*, *Maryborough* and *Ipswich* remained in the Mediterranean for some weeks after the departure of their five companions. The two first-named were mainly employed on escort work between Alexandria and Malta. *Ipswich* was for a time caught up in the aftermath of the Italian collapse in its effect in the Dodecanese Islands. At a conference at Hitler's headquarters on 24th September the future of these islands was discussed, and both the Army chiefs and Doenitz recommended "the timely evacuation of our outposts on the islands in the Aegean Sea, including Crete". Hitler agreed with the arguments they presented, but could not order the evacuation of the islands

especially the Dodecanese and Crete, on account of the political repercussions which would necessarily follow. The attitude of our allies in the Southeast, and likewise Turkey's attitude, is determined exclusively by their confidence in our strength. Abandonment of the islands would create the most unfavourable impression. To avoid such a blow to our prestige we may even have to accept the eventual loss of our troops and material. The supply of the islands must be assured by the Air Force.<sup>7</sup>

The fate of the Aegean islands similarly and simultaneously exercised the minds of the British leaders. Before the Hitler conference of 24th September the Germans acted strongly in Crete and Rhodes, where they disarmed the Italians and took charge. But the British—operating with forces numerically inadequate—occupied Castellorizo Island, off the southwest tip of Asia Minor, and Cos, Leros, and Samos. Cos, strategically the most important island next to Rhodes, and the only one on which the British could operate an airfield, was taken by a German parachute descent on 3rd October. Circumstances denied the British the strength to stage an invasion assault on Rhodes. Leros fell to the Germans on 16th November, and as many of the British garrisons as could be were withdrawn from Samos and other islands.

On the day the Germans took Cos, H.M.A.S. *Ipswich* sailed from Port Said to take a small part in these Dodecanese adventures. During October she escorted two convoys between Lebanon, Cyprus, and Castellorizo Island. As her commanding officer, McBryde, subsequently recounted in conversation:

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<sup>7</sup> *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1943.

Of the Eastern Fleet ships we four [*Ipswich*, *Gawler*, *Lismore* and *Maryborough*] and *Shoreham* all came back to Alexandria with the intention of going back to the Eastern Fleet, but we were diverted and spent five weeks in the Levant, working on the convoy route and escorting two little Italian ships and British ships to the Dodecanese. Things were pretty bad at the time. We were just in the process of losing Leros, and a lot of our ships were up there and got very badly knocked about. We lost quite a few ships, destroyers and other stuff, by aircraft. We had no very great excitement there. We used to slip in with a convoy just after dark into Castellorizo, and slip out again in the morning just before daylight, and go back to Cyprus and Beirut. We left at the end of October and returned to the Eastern Fleet.

*Gawler* and *Ipswich* both passed through the Canal at the end of October, and reached Aden on 4th November. *Maryborough*, last of the eight corvettes to leave the Mediterranean, and last R.A.N. ship there during the war, arrived at Suez on 15th November, and did not reach Aden until the 21st of that month. She, with her companions of the 21st Minesweeping Flotilla, resumed their Indian Ocean duties with the Arabian-Bengal-Ceylon Escort Force. *Geraldton*, *Cairns*, *Cessnock* and *Wollongong*, which all reached Aden at the beginning of October, had already taken up duty with the Persian Gulf escort group.

## V

For these little Australian-built ships and their ships' companies it had been a testing and interesting interlude, and both ships and men came through well. Something of the conditions on board is reflected in "Letters of Proceedings" and the remarks of commanding officers. McBryde, in conversation with the author, told of "a very happy ship's company" in *Ipswich*.

Morale was very cheerful. How did our chaps get on with the R.N. people? Very well indeed; we had a few in our ship's company. Food was a sore question with us in the Mediterranean. There was nothing like the variety we were used to on R.A.N. victualling. We had no eggs, just cabbage and pumpkin, potatoes, and very bad meat. The victualling allowance was 1/11½d a day—and it cost us about 1/6d to 2/- a day extra to live. The men got extras from NAAFI;<sup>8</sup> their prices are fairly high on the whole, but when you compare them with what the shore people charge, they are not so bad.

*Gawler's* commanding officer, Seymour, reported on leaving the Mediterranean that the health and morale of the ship's company were satisfactory, "but it is high time the men had a real rest and change. Every effort will be made to arrange this when refitting." *Gawler* refitted in South Africa, at Port Elizabeth, throughout January and February 1944, and the "real rest and change" materialised. Seymour recorded in his "Letter of Proceedings" for the period:

Sixteen days' leave, inclusive of travelling time, was granted to each watch, and later on, the date of completion having been put back, a further six days' leave to each watch was granted. The greatest kindness was encountered on all sides. Most of the men spent their leave in or near Johannesburg, and it is satisfactory to be

<sup>8</sup> Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes canteens.

able to report that, despite apparent almost overwhelming hospitality, a message was received from the Mayor of Johannesburg commenting on their good behaviour. The Port Elizabeth Navy League, apparently a very well-off and efficient organisation, made all leave arrangements, including hosts for those officers and men who did not wish to spend their leave independently. In addition to this, they paid the difference between the 100 mile railway warrants allowed, and the railway fare to Johannesburg (approximately 700 miles). *Gawler* eventually sailed from Port Elizabeth with only one newly married man, and it is considered that under the circumstances we got off lightly.

In this context it is perhaps opportune to record an entry in the "Report of Proceedings" of H.M.S. *Suffolk*,<sup>9</sup> which spent a brief period in Fremantle in August 1943. The cruiser's commanding officer remarked:

The cordiality of our welcome by Commodore C. J. Pope, N.O.I.C., W.A., and all his staff and departments, and indeed by what seemed to be the complete population of Perth and Fremantle exceeded even the most optimistic forecasts, and I can only say that everything possible had been done to make our short stay profitable and happy. The efficiency and promptitude with which the ship was served for fuel, provisions and stores left nothing at all to desired; it was quite exceptionally good. I should like to mention particularly the chaplain of the Missions to Seamen, the Reverend J. W. Clift, who was prepared to arrange for almost any number of men to spend days or even weeks in selected homes in the locality. A large number of men were arranged for in this way; judging from the firm invitations that they have received from their hosts and hostesses this hospitality was a mutual pleasure. From the officers' point of view it is enough to say that the delightful hospitality that was offered to us was on a scale that was almost embarrassing. . . . Fremantle was left with many regrets by all sections of the ship's company.

The ships themselves, in the way they stood up to hard work and enforced lack of adequate maintenance, reflected credit on the Australian materials and craftsmanship that fashioned them.<sup>1</sup> Leaving the Mediterranean, Seymour wrote of *Gawler* in the "Report of Proceedings" for November, 1943:

*Gawler* has now been 16 months in commission without a refit, and during this period has covered 57,000 miles. During the last eight months, time has permitted of running repairs only and these repairs have been of a sketchy nature due, it is presumed, to the inadequacy of dockyard facilities for the number of ships operating. It is considered that *Gawler's* Engineer Officer has done exceptionally well in keeping his engines and auxiliary machinery in running order under conditions of difficulty. Great credit, too, must be given to those concerned for the original quality of material and workmanship.

Marchington, in *Cessnock*, in September 1943 remarked that

in consequence of increases in armament, installation of radar etc., the ship's company now numbers 89. Form D326 in Ship's Book shows number of officers and men that can be berthed on board as 67. It is considered a tribute to the design of this class of ship that the complement can be increased by 33 per cent without noticeable overcrowding or discomfort.

<sup>9</sup> HMS *Suffolk*, cruiser (1928), 10,000 tons, eight 8-in guns, eight 4-in AA guns, 31½ kts.

<sup>1</sup> Three States, and six shipbuilding yards, were represented in these eight corvettes. N.S.W.—Cockatoo Dockyard (*Cessnock* and *Wollongong*); Mort's Dock (*Lismore*); Poole and Steele (*Geraldton*). Queensland—Evans Deakin, Brisbane (*Ipswich*), Walker Bros., Maryborough (*Maryborough*, *Cairns*); South Australia—Broken Hill Pty Ltd, Whyalla (*Gawler*).

In December 1943, when they had resumed work with the Arabian-Bengal-Ceylon escort group, both *Ipswich* and *Gawler* had experience of the way these ships could pack large excess numbers on board for short periods. On her last convoy run of the year *Ipswich*, in company with H.M.I.S. *Orissa*,<sup>2</sup> was escorting convoy "JC30" from Colombo to Vizagapatam. Just after noon on 23rd December, one of the ships in the convoy, the P. and O. *Peshawur* (7,934 tons) was torpedoed, and sank three hours later. *Ipswich*, after a prolonged but fruitless search for the assailant, picked up 134 survivors from six lifeboats and landed them at Madras next morning. Three days later, and some 2,500 miles to the south-westward, *Gawler* (temporarily detached from the ABC escort group to refit at Port Elizabeth), in company with *Maryborough* left Kilindini at dawn on 27th December to escort s.s. *Burma* (7,821 tons) to Durban. However this ship, which was carrying 1,000 Italian prisoners of war, went aground about four miles south of Kilindini. When the two Australian corvettes returned to that port later in the day, *Maryborough* had on board 76 of the Italians, and *Gawler* 393. "It is observed," remarked Seymour in his report, "that while care was taken to avoid drastic alterations of course, *Gawler* was not as tender as might be expected with that number of men on board."

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<sup>2</sup> HMIS *Orissa*, corvette (1941), 650 tons, one 3-in AA gun, 15½ kts.

## CHAPTER 11

### THE MISSION OF *KRAIT*

AT 6 p.m. on 8th September 1943 General Eisenhower, in Algiers, broadcast the announcement of the Italian armistice. On 10th September the master of a small motor sampan wearing the Japanese merchant ensign and heading westward through the Java Sea approximately 60 miles south of Borneo's southernmost point, Cape Selatan, wrote in his log:

The day is fine, a few scattered clouds and a slight haze around the horizon. Everyone was very pleased to hear that Italy had thrown in the towel freeing the Mediterranean Fleet from its duties. . . . By dark tonight we will be across the main shipping routes from Sourabaya and Batavia to Balikpapan and all ports using the Macassar Strait. Our lookouts are particularly keen and so far have always sighted any objects long before we could possibly be seen by them. . . . Most of the dye has washed off by now and we all resemble studies in black and white. . . .

The sampan and her brindle company belied the flag under which they sailed. The sampan was, in essence, of Japanese nationality, having been Japanese built as the *Kofuku Maru*, a diesel-engined vessel of 68 gross registered tons, 70 feet long and 11 feet beam, capable under favourable conditions of six-and-a-half knots, with a range of 8,000 miles. As *Kofuku Maru* she was, before the Far Eastern war, owned by a Japanese fishing firm in Singapore, employed as a fish carrier and supply vessel for the boats fishing in the vicinity of the Anambas Islands. When war came with Japan she was seized by the British and used in the rescue of survivors from ships sunk off the east coast of Sumatra. During this period about 1,100 persons were transported in her, including a number rescued from the island of Pompong in the Lingga Archipelago. When the Netherlands East Indies surrendered in March 1942, she left the Inderagiri River in Sumatra and was sailed to India by a civilian, W. R. Reynolds. After some months in India she came out to Australia and, after many vicissitudes owing to engine trouble, sailed from Exmouth Gulf on 1st September 1943 on a voyage to her old home port of Singapore. She was now the *Krait*, operated in the service of the Allied Intelligence Bureau. Her company, fourteen in all, was made up of six "operatives" of the Services Reconnaissance Department of A.I.B., who were to attack with limpet mines Japanese ships in Singapore; and eight crew members whose job was to take the operatives in *Krait* to near their destination, and pick them up and return them to Australia when their mission was completed.

The Services Reconnaissance Department had its origin in March 1942 when Colonel G. E. Mott arrived in Australia from Britain, where he was a member of the Special Operations Executive, a body responsible for the organisation of subversive operations in enemy territory, and of resistance movements in enemy-occupied countries. Mott—advised by the D.N.I.,

Melbourne, and by Lieut-Colonel Oldham<sup>1</sup> who was detailed by General Blamey—formed in Melbourne in March 1942 a replica of the Special Operations Executive in the form of the Inter-Allied Services Department, with headquarters in Domain Road, South Yarra, Melbourne. The first unit formed by I.A.S.D. was “Z” Special Unit, an administrative unit for men who performed secret and unorthodox tasks.

Such a task envisaged was that of attacking ships in Singapore. Among those who escaped thence in 1942 when the Japanese invaded Malaya were Major H. A. Campbell, of the King’s Own Scottish Borderers, and Captain Lyon<sup>2</sup> of the Gordon Highlanders. They came down to Australia. In Melbourne they called on the D.N.I. and to him outlined plans they had in mind for such an attack. Commander Long, who was impressed, sent them with his recommendation to Admiral Royle, and Naval Board approval of the scheme was received. *Krait* was secured, volunteers from the Navy were forthcoming both to man the ship and join the operatives, and training was carried out.

There were, however, successive delays due to engine trouble in *Krait*—the only available vessel suitable for the task—and early in 1943 it was decided to abandon the operation. The naval personnel were transferred, as a unit, to “Special Operations” and Campbell and Lyon, who were anxious to remain in Australia, were attached to the Inter-Allied Services Department which, in July 1942, had become a section of the Allied Intelligence Bureau. In April 1943 Colonel Mott returned to England, and the name Inter-Allied Services Department was changed to Special Operations, Australia, soon afterwards being changed yet again to Services Reconnaissance Department with Colonel P. J. F. Chapman-Walker as Director. Associated with the Services Reconnaissance Department at its South Yarra headquarters was Mr Manderson,<sup>3</sup> a former Melbourne journalist. Manderson, a man of varied and outstanding talents, was of considerable behind-the-scenes help to the three senior operatives in the *Krait* expedition.

Later in 1943 the plan to attack Japanese ships in Singapore was revived and developed. After much work *Krait* was made seaworthy, and in September, posing as an Indonesian trader, was ready to sail on her hazardous voyage from Exmouth Gulf. The route was to be through Lombok Strait, across the Java Sea, along the south-west and west coasts of Borneo, and thence westward across to the Lingga Archipelago and the islands south of Singapore.

On 1st September 1943 *Krait* was in Exmouth Gulf ready to sail. She carried a supply of limpet mines, and two-man canoes in which the operatives would enter the chosen harbours to deliver their attacks on ships alongside and at anchor. The six operatives were Lyon—now a major

<sup>1</sup> Lt-Col A. G. Oldham, ED. HQ 6 Div and “Z” Special Unit (comd 1943-44). Merchant; of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 9 Dec 1906.

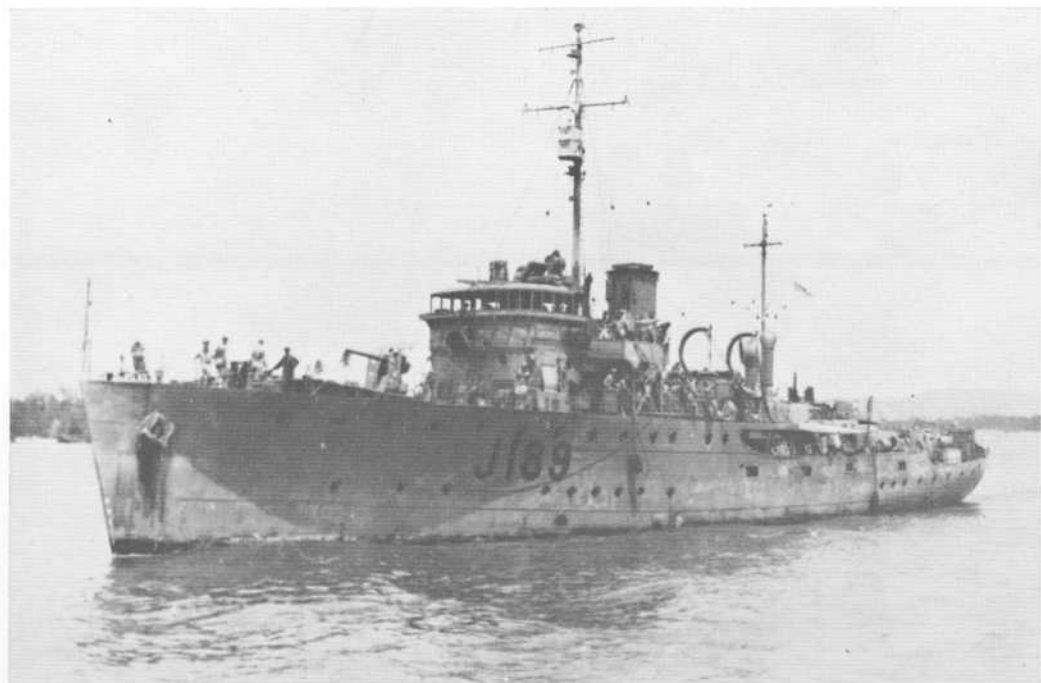
<sup>2</sup> Lt-Col I. Lyon, DSO, MBE, 2/Gordon Highlanders and Force 136 (SOE). Regular soldier; b. 17 Aug 1915. Killed in action October 1944.

<sup>3</sup> H. B. Manderson. Journalist; of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 17 Jul 1886. Died 29 Mar 1961.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Dutch ship *Bantam* under air attack, Oro Bay, 28th March 1943.



(Captain G. C. F. Branson)

H.M.A.S. *Pirie* after air attack at Oro Bay, 11th April 1943.





(R.A.N. Historical Section)

H.M.A.S. *Hobart*, showing damage sustained to quarter-deck and after turrets from a torpedo hit on 20th July 1943.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

A Fairmile motor launch.



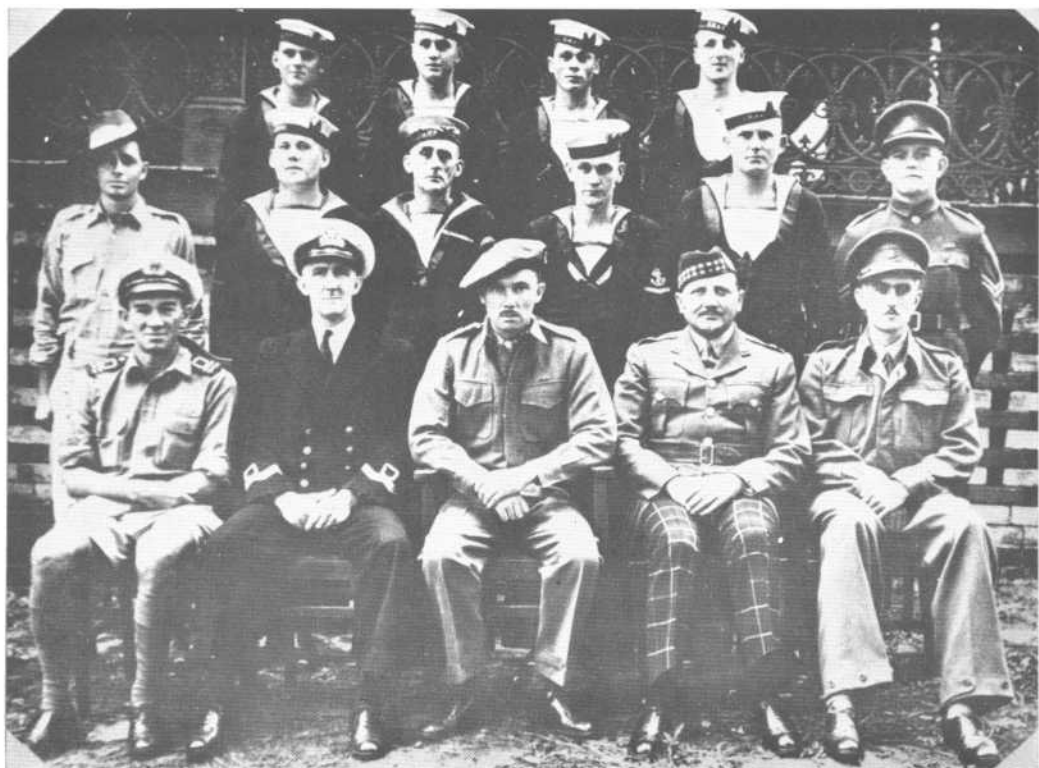
H.M.A.S. *Gascoyne*, December 1943.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



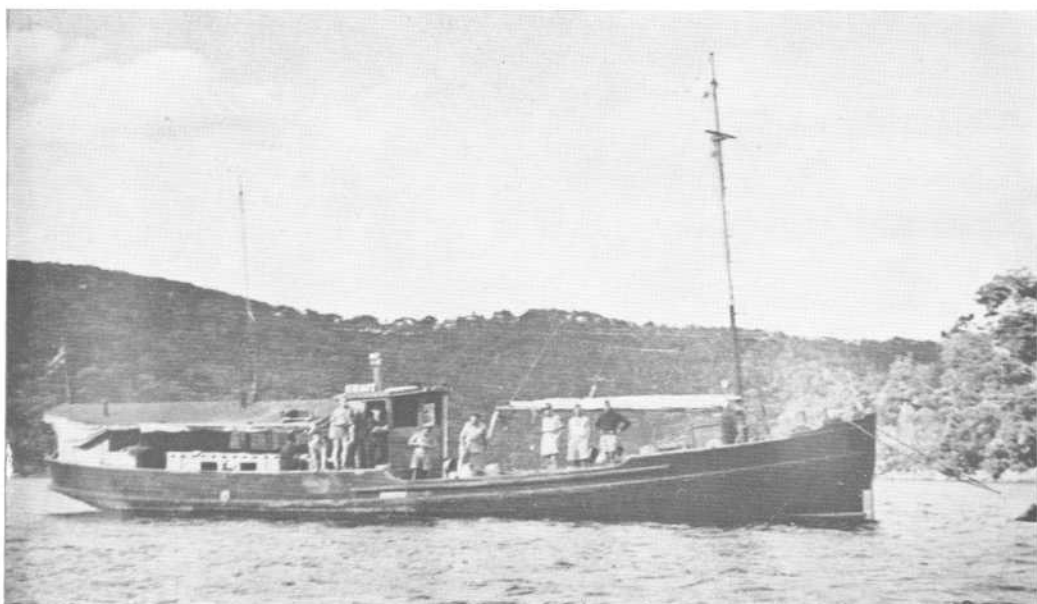
H.M.A. Ships *Australia* and *Arunta* bombarding at Cape Gloucester, 26th December 1943,  
as seen from H.M.A.S. *Shropshire*.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

The crew and operatives of *Krait*. *L. to R. front*: Lieutenant H. E. Carse, Lieutenant D. M. N. Davidson, Major I. Lyon, Major H. A. Campbell, Lieutenant R. C. Page; *middle row*: Corporal A. A. Crilly, Leading Seaman K. P. Cain, Leading Stoker J. P. McDowell, Leading Telegraphist H. S. Young, Able Seaman W. G. Falls, Corporal R. G. Morris; *back row*: Able Seamen M. Berryman, F. W. L. Marsh, A. W. Jones, A. W. G. Huston. (Campbell, who came out of Singapore with Lyon, did not accompany the JAYWICK expedition.)



*Krait*.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)

and in command of the party; Lieutenant Davidson,<sup>4</sup> R.N.V.R.; Lieutenant Page,<sup>5</sup> A.I.F.; Able Seamen Falls,<sup>6</sup> Jones<sup>7</sup> and Huston.<sup>8</sup> The ship's company were Lieutenant Carse,<sup>9</sup> R.A.N.V.R., Commanding Officer; Leading Stoker McDowell,<sup>10</sup> Leading Telegraphist Young;<sup>1</sup> Leading Seaman Cain;<sup>2</sup> Able Seamen Berryman<sup>3</sup> and Marsh;<sup>4</sup> and Corporals Morris,<sup>5</sup> R.A.M.C., and Crilly,<sup>6</sup> A.I.F.

At 5.30 p.m. on 1st September *Krait* cast off from *Ondina* from whom she had been oiling and watering, and proceeded on her voyage. One minute later her propeller shaft broke—the final pre-mission misfortune in a long series of mechanical troubles—and she anchored, and was repaired by U.S.S. *Chanticleer*,<sup>7</sup> and eventually sailed at 2 p.m. on the 2nd north bound for Lombok Strait. The voyage, though without incident, was starred with apprehension.

To lend an air of verisimilitude to what would otherwise be a possibly bald and unconvincing *Krait* if sighted in enemy waters by aircraft or other vessels close to, colouring matter had been provided to darken the skins of her company, and on the 4th the first experiments with it were made on Lyon and Davidson. "It proved a rank failure," recorded Carse in his log, "more black everywhere than on the person after an hour or two." Nevertheless, at 4 p.m. next day: "The crew now resemble black-amooers, a more desperate looking crowd I have never seen."

The mountain peaks of Lombok and Bali were sighted just after noon on 8th September, but it was nearly 24 hours later before the hazardous passage of Lombok Strait, with its possibility of meeting enemy patrol craft, was accomplished. Heavy adverse tides and rips held *Krait* in the strait. Carse recorded in his log of the night 8th-9th:

A night of worry. Until sundown we proceeded at about four knots towards Nusa Besar increasing speed to 860 revolutions at 1825. Nusa Besar about 11 miles distant. Course N.N.E. 2100 Nusa Besar almost abeam Red 80. 2200 Nusa Besar

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Cdr D. M. N. Davidson, DSO; RNVR. SRD. Farmer and merchant. Presumed killed in action October 1944.

<sup>5</sup> Capt R. C. Page, DSO; AIF. 2/4 Pnr Bn and SRD. Medical student; of Potts Point, NSW; b. Sydney, 21 Jul 1920. Executed by Japanese 7 Jul 1945.

<sup>6</sup> AB W. G. Falls, DSM, S6543; SRD. Dairy farmer; b. Aberdeen, Scotland, 5 Jan 1920. Executed by Japanese 7 Jul 1945.

<sup>7</sup> AB A. W. Jones, DSM, F3383. HMAS's *Perth*, *Manoora*, *Krait* (SRD), *Colac*. Grocer's assistant; of Perth; b. Guildford, WA, 24 Feb 1922.

<sup>8</sup> AB A. W. G. Huston, DSM, B3312; SRD. Of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 25 Dec 1923. Presumed killed in action October 1944.

<sup>9</sup> Lt H. E. Carse, RANVR. Comd m.v's *Gnair* and *Krait* (SRD). Foreman; of Sydney; b. Rutherglen, Vic, 28 May 1901.

<sup>10</sup> Ldg Stoker J. P. McDowell, DSM, B2575. HMAS's *Heros*, *Krait* (SRD), *Australia*. B. Belfast, Ireland, 23 Sep 1900. Died 10 Jan 1964.

<sup>1</sup> Ldg Telegraphist H. S. Young, S3428. HMAS's *Goolgwai*, *Krait* (SRD), *Yandra*. Of Sydney; b. Western Australia, 11 Apr 1921.

<sup>2</sup> Ldg Seaman K. P. Cain, B1506. *Krait* (SRD). Of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 13 Aug 1915.

<sup>3</sup> AB M. Berryman, PA2717. *Krait* (SRD), HMAS *Vendetta*. Sharebroker's clerk; of Adelaide; b. Adelaide, 9 Nov 1923.

<sup>4</sup> AB F. W. L. Marsh, B3666. *Krait* (SRD). Apprentice; b. Brisbane, 20 Jan 1924. Died while prisoner of war, 1 Feb 1945.

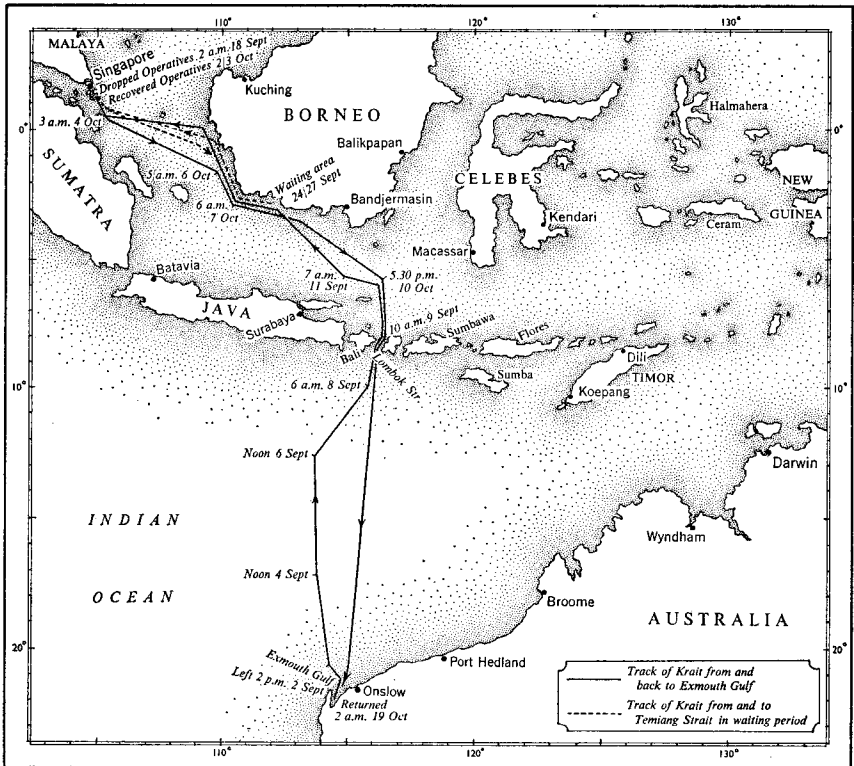
<sup>5</sup> Sgt R. G. Morris, MM, BEM; RAMC. SRD. Coalminer; of Wales.

<sup>6</sup> Sgt A. A. Crilly, MM. 24 Fd Coy, 2/14 Bn and SRD. Labourer; of West Ipswich, Qld; b. Fauldhouse, Scotland, 23 Oct 1913. Died 20 Sep 1963.

<sup>7</sup> *Chanticleer*, US submarine rescue vessel (1942), 1,653 tons, two 3-in guns, 16½ kts.

almost abeam Red 85. 2300 Nusa Besar almost abeam Red 80. So in spite of maximum speed, a glorious  $6\frac{1}{2}$  knots, we are steadily losing ground. Midnight Nusa Besar abeam, Hurrah! Sep. 9th 0100 Nusa Besar still abeam. 0200 We commence to make slight headway and by 0400 have made good six miles since midnight.

At 6 a.m. on the 9th, day dawned to find *Krait* still in the strait, and it was not until 10 a.m. that Carse entered a heartfelt "Thank Christ! We



Cruise of the *Krait*

are through." Extracts from the log give something of a picture of the voyage:

9th September, 1030 sighted Macassar prau dead ahead sailing with a good breeze on the beam in an easterly direction. Altered course NNW to avoid her. 1100 resumed course. This war is certainly hard on the nervous system. 12.30 sighted Macassar prau, altered course to avoid. 1315 resumed course. 1700 sighted Macassar prau bearing Red 80. Mast tops only visible.

The game of hide-and-seek with other vessels was continuous but, as Carse recorded: "Our lookouts are particularly keen and so far have always sighted any objects long before we could possibly be seen by them."

The ship's water-supply was a problem because of lack of space:

I have been praying for a good shower of rain ever since the days have become hot. In latitude 5 degrees south with the sun only 5 degrees north its heat as close to the water as we are is terrific. The decks become too hot to stand on in bare feet. To counteract this our freeboard is so little that with even a calm sea our waist is continually awash.

A key member of the ship's company doing a memorable job was McDowell:

Our engineer, Leading Stoker McDowell, has been invaluable. He has worked day and night training crew and operatives to help him in his duties and to be able to operate the engine should anything happen to him, as well as tending and servicing the engine. In fact he looks after the engine better and treats it more carefully than a mother would a baby. No matter how long the hours he works away, stopping troubles before they have developed and always cheerful and happy. No man could be better suited to the job than he is.

Tanjong Puting, on Borneo's south coast, was sighted at 9.15 a.m. on the 12th, and at 8.15 next morning *Krait* rounded Tanjong Sambar, Borneo's south-western extremity, and sailed northwards along the island's west coast to go north about the Karimata Archipelago. At 7.30 a.m. on the 14th, *Krait*, between Penebangan Island and the Masien Tiga Islands and heading W.N.W. across the China Sea for the Lingga Archipelago, was "surrounded by nine sailing craft, including one large junk apparently on our course. The others were nondescript rigs, gunter rigged one masters and two masters." That afternoon Carse summed up:

I decided we had seven more really dangerous days with the ship. Namely today and tomorrow, dropping and picking up the operatives, two days for this passage on return, and last but not least the STRAIT. If we survive the next two days the operation should be carried out successfully and then for our return journey. All the ship's company are in the best of health and spirits and are thoroughly enjoying the trip. . . . The sailing vessels seen this morning were all apparently engaged in the coastal trade along the coast of Borneo as we have seen none since we started to cross the Karimata Strait. . . . It seems peculiar that we should be cruising at our leisure through these seas with no sign of challengers, but there is a feeling of anxiety all the same. This is definitely not the same as the Lombok type but is there all the same. Each day as the sun goes down I mutter a heartfelt 'Thank God!'

On the 16th *Krait* passed through Temiang Strait in the Lingga Archipelago. The night of the 16th-17th was spent anchored off Pompong Island. Occasional aircraft passed overhead, and from 4.30 a.m. to 6.30 a.m. on the 17th "the sound of engines being revved up was plainly audible". Anchor was weighed at 8.45 a.m. and the 17th was spent "zigzagging and zigzagging all day long from one deserted looking spot to another" in search of a suitable disembarkation point. At 2 a.m. on the 18th, after seeing "the lights of Singapore glowing a mere 22 miles away", *Krait* anchored off Panjang Island in the Rhio Archipelago and commenced disembarking the operatives, their canoes and other gear. "The operation went off without a hitch and at 0445 we raised anchor and started to retrace our steps."

For the next fourteen days *Krait* cruised around mainly off the south-west coast of Borneo, filling in time before she was due back in the Lingga

Archipelago to pick up the operatives off Pompong Island. It was a trying period, made more so for those on board by a total absence of news regarding the fortunes of the operatives. *Krait* rounded the Karimata Archipelago north about on 21st September, and Carse recorded: "We listen to hear if there is any news of our party of which no news is good news"—but that assessment of silence was to change as time went on. At day-break on the 22nd Tanjong Beras Basah, on Borneo's west coast, was abeam but hidden in low overcast and haze. Crilly, the cook, whose culinary qualifications were "that he was a fair motor mechanic and had a rough idea how to cook pancakes", traded on that sparse knowledge, and Carse recorded:

Our cook is certainly living up to his name of Pancake Andy. We get them at least once a day. When the cruise commenced pancakes were one of my favourites. At the present rate if I ever look at one again I will be sick. I must admit however that they are far more appetising than hard biscuits. What wouldn't we give for a loaf of bread and a good sirloin steak.

In variable weather *Krait* hung about off and on the south-west corner of Borneo for some days. As opportunity offered her company scraped off the grass now befouling her bottom. The 24th was the day on which the operatives planned to make their attack on the ships at Singapore, and that day Carse wrote:

This waiting about is the worst part of the trip so far. If we had an objective it would not be so bad or if the weather was fine and we could work on the ship. We have lately been rising to the seas but today the waves are so close together and so steep that they just curl over and topple on to the fo'castle while the wind picks up the spindrift and whirls it away. Well the show is on tonight, and completes half our estimated time in Japanese waters.

Next day: "Well, we are waiting for the first Japanese broadcast now to tell us the news of Singapore." But news was not forthcoming. Later in the day Carse wrote:

This afternoon's session gave no indication of any raid on Singapore so we will try again tonight. This waiting for something to happen is not easy and news of the raid would be very welcome.

"Still no news from Singapore" on 26th September, and Carse recorded then and on the 27th and 28th:

There is one thing I am heartily sick of and that is hanging around the coast of Borneo trying to dodge all comers. . . . Still no news from or of Sho-Nan. . . . We are all filled with anxiety as we have had no news at all of the party and this does not seem too good to us.

On the 29th *Krait*, which had worked north again along the Borneo coast, started her run across the China Sea to the Lingga Archipelago, and, as Carse noted:

We feel a little more cheerful now although we have had no news of the party as we now have a definite rendezvous and are going to it. Anxiety remains however as we do not know if we are walking into a trap or not.

In the event, the first news those in *Krait* got of the operative parties was when they picked up one canoe at Pompong Island soon after midnight 1st-2nd October. The crossing of the China Sea was made safely and *Krait* entered Temiang Strait on 1st October. "Everyone is anxiously awaiting news of the party," says her log of the period. "Another twelve hours now should either be the finish or allay all our fears." The ship reached Pompong at 12.20 a.m. on the 2nd and anchored, and "shortly afterwards we saw a canoe approaching. It contained Davidson and Falls." The other two canoes were there but could not find the ship in the darkness, and *Krait* retired south of the Temiang Strait for the day, and returned and picked them up at Pompong Island at 9 p.m. on 3rd October. The mission, so far, was successfully carried out.

During the absence of *Krait* the operatives had a fruitful period. After the ship left them they spent two days resting on Panjang Island, and at midnight on 22nd September established an observation post on Dongas Island in the Rhio Archipelago, whence it was possible to see into Keppel Harbour. Lyon recorded in his journal:

There was no change to be seen in the general outline of the city. A row of five to seven tall wireless masts have been constructed on the site of the former Paya Lebar station and there is a single mast on the roof of the Cathay Building. On the southernmost point of St John's Island there is now a small signal station. At Sambu, three miles from our O.P., all visible oil tanks were still as left by the Dutch. There was tremendous activity on the western side of the island; the hammering of plates and drone of engines by day and night suggested either ship repairing or building. In the harbour and roads of Singapore there was considerable movement of shipping. At no time during the five days of observation was there less than 100,000 tons at the same time.

In the night of 24th-25th September the three canoes left Dongas for an attack on some 65,000 tons of ships, but the attempt was abandoned at 1 a.m. on the 25th because of strong adverse tidal current. That night the party shifted from Dongas to a better placed observation post on Subar Island, overlooking the Examination Anchorage, and at 7 p.m. on the 26th the three canoes set out from Subar on a successful attack.

Canoe No. 1, Lyon and Huston, attacked a tanker and placed two limpet mines on the engine room and one on the propeller shaft. Lyon later recorded:

Halfway through the work Huston drew my attention to a man who was watching us intently from a porthole ten feet above. He continued to gaze until just before we left the ship, when he withdrew his head and lighted his bedside lamp. He took no apparent action and we set off for Dongas twelve miles away.

Canoe No. 2, Davidson and Falls, attached limpet mines to three ships in the Roads. "Each ship was attacked on the port side, away from Singapore's lights. We timed ourselves by a chiming clock (presumably on Victoria Hall) that told us the quarter hours."

Canoe No. 3, Page and Jones, attacked a total of three ships, one at Bukum Island and the others in Keppel Harbour. "The wharves were



lighted normally. Arabic numerals were in use in numbering them, and a sentry was posted on guard near the bows of the tanker, stationed on the wharf."

All the canoes were well clear of their target areas (Nos. 1 and 3 were back at Dongas Island) before the first explosion was heard at 5.15 a.m. on 27th September. It was subsequently confirmed that, in the raid, seven Japanese ships were sunk or badly damaged, including the 10,000-ton tanker *Sinkoku Maru*—in all between 37,000 and 39,000 tons.<sup>8</sup>

At 3 a.m. on 4th October *Krait* cleared Temiang Strait for the last time and set course E.S.E. for Borneo. Tanjong Sambar was rounded early on the 7th. On 10th October Carse noted in the log:

Now that we are getting close to the strait again, about 26 hours steaming, we are starting to get that Lombok feeling again. So far the weather has been perfect for us and we are hoping it will last for at least 300 miles south of enemy territory. . . . This afternoon we will adopt our disguises for the last time on the trip and then trust to good luck for the run through.

At 4.30 p.m. on 11th October *Krait* was approaching Lombok Strait. Lombok Island was clearly visible about 10 miles distant, and Bali's Agung peak was in sight above a cloud bank, bearing W.S.W.

We have all painted up again excepting Act/A.B. Jones, who in cases like this acts as a hand waver. He has the build of a Jap and somewhat the same colouring and is to show himself on deck and wave to any inquisitive Japanese plane that might circle round the ship either today or tomorrow or the day after. . . . Today has easily been the clearest day since commencing our return journey and the one day that we really did not need to see at all far. As there is nearly a full moon tonight I hope that it clouds over a little before we enter the strait.

With the approach of darkness *Krait* was driven at her utmost speed into a fresh south-easterly and short choppy sea, and tide rips in the northern narrows broke all over her. The weather eased about 11 p.m. as she got into the strait proper, and the water was fairly calm.

At 2330 the lookouts, Act/A.B.'s Falls and Jones, reported a sail approaching from the Lombok side. On looking at it I saw it was a large naval patrol, with a bone in her teeth, approaching rapidly on our beam. All hands were called and armed and everything prepared to evacuate. She approached bows on to within about one hundred yards, then slowed down and turned alongside on our port quarter. Seeing her beam on she appeared to be a modern type destroyer between 260 and 300 feet long. After pacing us for about five minutes she sheered off and went directly away from us. Although we were undoubtedly seen she did not hail or challenge us in any way, neither did she use a searchlight. As she turned a light was visible aft, otherwise she was in darkness. It was midnight before she was out of sight.

Why the stranger did not challenge remained a mystery.

It was bright moonlight at the time and we were flying the Japanese ensign which would have been plainly visible to them. This, plus our type of vessel, apparently swung the balance of doubt in our favour and left us in one large lump, safe and sound, although many sighs of relief were heard. At the time we were off Tanjong

<sup>8</sup> Only two Japanese ships—*Hakusan Maru* (2,197 tons) and *Kizan Maru* (5,077 tons)—are listed by the US Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee as having been sunk in this raid. *Japanese Naval and Merchant Shipping Losses During World War II* (1947), p. 44.

Batu Tiga on a S.S.W. course and all we could do was to alter course due west and hope for the best and it worked.

After this encounter *Krait* had a clear run through the strait, and at daybreak at 5.45 a.m. on 12th October was in the open sea, though Nusa Besar and Telok Blongas were still in sight astern. "Well," wrote Carse in the log, "if we survive today and tomorrow all should be well, but if possible we do not want another half hour like last night."

They were spared a repetition of that experience, and at 7 p.m. on the 12th Carse was able to record:

No sightings. We have just hauled the Japanese ensign down for the last time on this trip. From now on we once again become an efficient fighting force and instead of skulking by the by-ways and corners of the sea can now travel the main shipping lanes. It's a grand feeling to be free again on no-man's sea.

At 6 p.m. next day, 13th October, *Krait's* company "spliced the main brace" to celebrate their departure from the area of Japanese influence. At 11.40 a.m. on the 15th speed was reduced and the voyagers stood to arms when a flying boat, heading due east, was sighted "too far away to distinguish whether friend or foe"—but it passed from sight without apparently seeing the ship. The Monte Bello Islands were sighted at 11 a.m. on the 17th, and from then on the islands were raised and passed in quick succession—Barrow, Anchor, Long, Flat, Observation, Fly, Eva—and on the morning of 19th October 1943, Carse made his final entry in the log:

0200, came to anchor two miles east of USS *Chanticleer*. 0600 weighed and proceeded alongside *Chanticleer*. Work immediately commenced on urgent repairs.

Operation JAYWICK was successfully completed.

## CHAPTER 12

### ALLIED OFFENSIVES GATHER MOMENTUM

THE second half of 1943 was marked by significant Allied gains in the Pacific, as in the European theatre. By 1st October the last of the Japanese defenders of Vella Lavella, some 600 strong, were cornered in Marquana Bay on the north-west shore of the island, where men of the 3rd New Zealand Division—who relieved the Americans on 18th September—had driven them. They were successfully withdrawn by Japanese subchasers and landing craft in the first hours of 7th October during the destroyer action of Vella Lavella, the most important Solomons naval action since that of Vella Gulf on 6th-7th August. It was a Japanese victory in that, while covering the withdrawal of their Vella Lavella survivors, the numerically superior Japanese destroyer force—six under Rear-Admiral Ijuin to three American under Captain Walker—sank the American *Chevalier*<sup>1</sup> and damaged the other two, while itself suffering the loss of one ship, the destroyer *Yugumo* (1,900 tons). But for the Americans it was the loss of ships and men; for the Japanese the loss of another stage in the war.

While the Allies were thus thrusting northward in the Solomons they similarly advanced farther towards their current objective of Rabaul by securing in New Guinea some measure of control of the vital Dampier and Vitiaz Straits, with their capture of Lae, Salamaua, and Finschhafen. So far as the actual fighting was concerned, this was mainly an Australian Army operation, with American participation by a parachute battalion to capture the airfield at Nadzab, in the Markham Valley north-west of Lae. The Navy was concerned with the transport by sea of a portion of the forces concerned—and “the Navy” meant, very largely, the U.S. Navy. But though actual participation by the R.A.N. was small, it was of considerable importance, and the preparatory work carried out by the Australian Navy was vital to the success of the operation. It was carried out in the first place by the Survey Group, with H.M.A. Ships *Shepparton* (Commander Little,<sup>2</sup> C.T.G. 70.5) and *Benalla* (Lieut-Commander Tancred), with the help of *Stella* and *Polaris* and other small craft. Actively concerned in the actual movement of the troops by sea were the N.O.I.C. Milne Bay, Commander Branson; the Port Directors at Oro Bay, Buna, and Morobe; and the first of the R.A.N. Fairmile motor launches in the area, H.M.A.S. *ML.817*, commanded by Lieutenant Townley.

General Blamey’s plan for the capture of Lae envisaged a main seaborne landing by the 9th Division (which, since its return from the Middle East,

<sup>1</sup> *Chevalier*, US destroyer (1942), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. Sunk off Vella Lavella, 7 Oct 1943.

<sup>2</sup> Cdr C. G. Little, OBE, DSC; RAN. Naval Int 1940-41; i/c Hydrographic Service 1942; comd HMAS’s *Shepparton*, *Moresby*, *Warrego* 1943-45. Of Cue, WA; b. Mt Lofty, SA, 12 Jun 1901.

had undergone jungle and amphibious training in Queensland), and an overland attack from the Markham Valley by the 7th Division. During July and August the troops were transported by sea from the mainland, those of the 9th Division to Milne Bay, and the 7th to Moresby, whence they were carried to their attack launching positions by sea and air respectively. Transport by sea was by Admiral Barbey's VII Amphibious Force, from Milne Bay, Buna, and Morobe, and at a conference in Barbey's flagship *Rigel* in Milne Bay on 31st August between him and his staff and Branson, Little and Tancred, the Australians were asked to make every effort, navigationally, to ensure the safe passage of the amphibious force.

Arising from this conference, the U.S. Small Ships Section vessel *San Nicholas* was made available to Branson, and was sent by him, with the lighthouse engineer from Thursday Island on board, to see that all navigational aids between Milne Bay and Buna were in order. Little, with *Shepparton*, and Tancred with *Benalla*, went respectively to Morobe and Buna, whose port directors cooperated to make smooth passage for Barbey's force. Essential in these navigationally hazardous waters was the lighting of dangers in the Cape Nelson area to permit night passage, and this was organised under Little's direction. Owing to shortage of material, improvisation was necessary. Buna presented a difficult problem. Branson, in a Report of Proceedings of 5th September 1943, remarked:

Owing to the good work of the Sea Transport Officer, Lieutenant C. T. J. Adamson, RANVR, and the activities of Lieut-Commander Band<sup>3</sup> as Port Director, Buna is now well buoyed and lighted. Lighting the buoys was extremely difficult owing to lack of material. . . . In the absence of any suitable equipment we sent up from Milne Bay the steaming and side lights of the s.s. *Anshun*, which were salvaged from the wreck at Milne Bay. These were supplemented with the help of the 11th Australian Division now at Buna, who were our old friends of Fortress Command, Milne Bay. It is now possible to enter Buna at night, and along Strip Point Beach marks for LST's and LCT's and LCI's are now established. In this work Lieut-Commander Tancred and Lieut-Commander Band are to be congratulated. With nothing to work with except their initiative, they have turned Buna into a 24-hour-a-day port. This was essential for the present operations and for the re-supply of the forces now engaged against Lae.

As stated earlier, in December 1942 four American P.T. boats were based on Milne Bay. They were the forerunners of a considerable force which, in September 1943 constituted TG.70.1, commanded by Commander Morton C. Mumma, U.S.N., then based in U.S.S. *Hilo* (a converted P.T. tender) at Buna. By this time—September 1943—a flotilla of nine<sup>4</sup> Australian Fairmile motor-launches was also operating in the area in support of Mumma's boats harassing Japanese barge traffic along the Huon Peninsula. As mentioned, first to arrive in the area—in June 1943—

<sup>3</sup> Lt-Cdr J. M. Band, RANR. HMAS's *Moresby* and *Hobart*; Port Director, Buna, 1943. B. South Shields, England, 22 Mar 1902. Died of wounds, Finschhafen landing, 23 Sep 1943.

<sup>4</sup> *ML424* (Lieutenant J. A. Doyle, RANR); *ML425* (Lieutenant G. S. H. Champion, RANR); *ML427* (Lieutenant H. E. Godden, RANVR); *ML428* (Lieutenant J. S. Berge, RANVR); *ML801* (Lieutenant R. L. Carne, RANVR); *ML806* (Lieutenant H. C. Shipway, RANVR); *ML816* (Lieutenant K. J. McLaren, RANR); *ML817* (Lieutenant A. G. Townley, RANVR); *ML819* (Lieutenant R. A. E. Moore, RANVR).

was *ML.817*. She did a number of convoy runs between Moresby-Milne Bay-Oro Bay-Buna; and also carried out patrols and survey work at Woodlark, Egum, the Trobriands, Louisiades and D'Entrecasteaux Islands. She knew the area well, and was assigned to Admiral Barbey for policing duties when large numbers of landing craft were moved to a rigid timetable; and it was in this capacity that she was used in the Lae operation.

She left Milne Bay in the afternoon of 1st September, carrying Branson, and his Staff Officer (Operations), Lieutenant Joel,<sup>5</sup> to keep a running commentary on the movements of all ships of the Amphibious Force engaged in the operation, so that the orderly flow might be observed and directed from the two main staging points, Buna and Morobe. The Milne Bay section of the Lae armada, comprising three American destroyers and 21 L.C.I's, sailed at 2.30 p.m. next day. Admiral Barbey was in destroyer *Conyngham*. Two Australians important to the work in hand were with him, Major-General Wootten,<sup>6</sup> commanding the 9th Division; and Lieutenant Howitt<sup>7</sup> who, because of his intimate knowledge of the Huon Gulf area and of the actual geographical position and topography of the landing beaches, was on board as pilot. *ML.817* was in Buna on the 2nd, and reached Morobe on the 3rd at 11 a.m. At that hour the Milne Bay contingent reached Buna, where it was joined by more L.C.I's and L.C.M's. During the night, as it steamed towards its objective, the convoy was joined by more landing craft from Morobe, and a total of 87 vessels were escorted across Huon Gulf. Meanwhile *ML.817*, in Morobe, had a taste of Japanese reaction to the Allied movements.

As a preliminary to the assault, General Kenney's air force carried out big bombing raids against Japanese bases. On 1st and 2nd September they attacked Madang and Wewak respectively, and now the enemy began to retaliate. Reconnaissance revealed a build-up of some 200 aircraft at Rabaul, and *ML.817*'s arrival at Morobe coincided with an air raid warning which was followed by an attack by nine "Betty" Navy medium bombers, and 27 fighters just after noon on the 3rd. At the time *ML.817* was fast alongside *Shepparton*, lying at anchor about 1,000 yards from Morobe wharf. Branson, who had boarded *Shepparton*, later recorded:

Both ships were straddled, and approximately 36 anti-personnel bombs were dropped. They started from about 200 yards off our port quarter and finished up about 300 yards on the starboard bow of *Shepparton*. Fortunately there were no direct hits or casualties, although some came unpleasantly near, and *ML.817* collected about 40 holes on the port side. I was very much impressed by the efficiency and morale of *ML.817*. Townley got his ship under way in a matter of seconds, although the blast had thrown him on his face on the quarterdeck. . . . So quickly did *ML.817* react to the situation that by the time I had jumped

<sup>5</sup> Lt Hon A. A. Joel, OBE; RANVR. SO (Ops) Milne Bay 1943; RAN PRO, GHQ SWPA 1944-45. MLC NSW since 1957. Journalist and organising secretary; of Sydney; b. Stanmore, NSW, 4 May 1912.

<sup>6</sup> Maj-Gen Sir George Wootten, KBE, CB, DSO, ED. (1st AIF: 1 Bn and BM 11 and 9 Inf Bdes.) CO 2/2 Bn 1939-40; comd 18 Bde 1941-43; GOC 9 Div 1943-45. Solicitor; of West Wyalong and Mosman, NSW; b. Marrickville, NSW, 1 May 1893.

<sup>7</sup> Lt-Cdr E. M. Howitt, RANVR. Comd *ML427* and *ML808* 1945. Of Deagon, Qld; b. 30 Jul 1905.

aboard again the lines were let go, the guns crews were closed up, and the Midshipman,<sup>8</sup> with his face covered in blood, was at his action station prepared to direct the gunfire. As soon as the ML was clear of *Shepparton* the former opened fire with her forward two-pounder gun, and this was the first and only controlled gunfire that I saw in Morobe that morning.

On the night of the 3rd Branson accompanied Commander Mumma in a P.T. boat sweep of Huon Gulf to detect any enemy surface vessels and to draw the fire of possible shore batteries and machine-gun nests by close-in patrolling of the landing beaches. Four P.T. boats participated, but, "apart from some light strafing of individual points we had nothing to report by daylight".<sup>9</sup>

Soon after first light on the 4th (which discovered the White Ensign worn by *ML.817* in the offing), *Conyngham* identified the landing beaches, and she and other destroyers bombarded the area as a preliminary to the landing of the first wave of assault troops from four destroyer transports.<sup>1</sup> Howitt, in *Conyngham*, later reported:

Between 4.30 and 4.45 a.m. 4th September our objectives—"Red Beach" and "Yellow Beach"—were identified at a range of approximately 6,000 yards. It was a dark, clear night; visibility good; wind slight north-west; sea smooth. *Conyngham* was leading ship of the convoy which, at this time, was proceeding at eight knots. At 8.30 a.m. convoy hove to off beach, bearing north distance 5,000 yards. . . . Bombardment of the shore was carried out by destroyers steaming parallel to the beach at a range of approximately 4,000 yards for about 30 minutes, the LCI's carrying the troops going in under cover of this barrage. As the bombardment ceased, troops landed on "Red" Beach. No opposition whatever from the enemy was encountered during the landing operations, except for one burst of machine-gun fire from the eastward of the beach. This machine-gun post was promptly silenced by one of the flanking armed launches.

About an hour later enemy bombers attacked and scored two direct hits on L.C.I's which were beached. Casualties were only two killed and eight wounded. Later, when L.S.T's were landing heavy equipment, one went hard aground. She was refloated "by the aid of destroyers steaming fast inshore to cause a wash while the U.S. tug *Sonoma* towed hard". Early in the afternoon another Japanese air attack scored direct hits on two L.S.T's, "causing casualties of approximately 160 killed and wounded and 34 missing".<sup>2</sup>

For the rest of the operation the navy's task was the usual one of maintaining communications, with some bombardment missions. The capture of Salamaua (which was achieved on 11th September) and of Lae on the 16th, was the work of the soldiers. So was the capture of Finschhafen, which fell to Brigadier Windeyer's<sup>3</sup> 20th Brigade on 2nd October, after they had been ferried there from Lae on 21st-22nd September by VII Amphibious Force.

<sup>8</sup> Midshipman D. L. Price, RANR. *ML817*'s executive officer. He received a scalp wound over the left eye from shrapnel.

<sup>9</sup> Branson's Report.

<sup>1</sup> Brooks, Gilmer, Sands and Humphreys.

<sup>2</sup> Howitt's report.

<sup>3</sup> Maj-Gen Rt Hon Sir Victor Windeyer, KBE, CB, DSO, ED. CO 2/48 Bn 1940-42; comd 20 Bde 1942-45. Barrister-at-law; of Sydney; b. Hunter's Hill, NSW, 28 Jul 1900.

*ML.817*'s part in the invasion of Lae concluded on the day of the first landing, and on 5th September she was back in Milne Bay. She had been severely shaken by the near misses in the air raid at Morobe. The near-by bomb explosions had lifted her right out of the water and had caused constructional damage. Her timbers were distorted, and propeller shafts and engine accessories thrown out of alignment. She was towed back to the Australian mainland, now commanded by Lieutenant Doyle,<sup>4</sup> whose place in *ML.424* was taken by Townley as acting lieutenant-commander.

## II

On the day Finschhafen fell, Admiral Crutchley's Task Force 74, then in the Palm Island area just north of Townsville, comprised one ship, H.M.A.S. *Australia*. The cruiser spent a lonely ten days there carrying out firing practices. On the 13th of the month she was joined by U.S.S. *Bagley*, and on the 15th the two ships arrived at Milne Bay, where they had been ordered by Commander Seventh Fleet, Admiral Carpenter, to be on hand should any Japanese surface force move against Finschhafen. Air reconnaissance of Rabaul had disclosed the presence there of two heavy cruisers, and Allied Intelligence envisaged the possibility of an enemy landing near Finschhafen about dusk on 16th October, accompanied by air strike and surface bombardment.

At Milne Bay H.M.A.S. *Warramunga* and U.S.S. *Helm* joined the Task Force, but soon returned to Sydney; and on 21st October, apprehension of a Japanese surface attack having eased, Task Force 74 proceeded to Brisbane. Here the Task Force built up to more respectable stature. On the 29th *Arunta* joined. On 30th October Comdesron 4 (Captain Walker, U.S.N.) reported for duty with U.S.S. *Ralph Talbot*. And that day, too, *Warramunga* rejoined the force, and *Shropshire*, newly arrived in Australia, reported also. One factor causing lessening of Allied anticipations of a Japanese surface attack at Finschhafen was the series of heavy air raids developed on Rabaul by General Kenney's Fifth Air Force. It opened on 12th October with an attack by 349 aircraft—the biggest air attack up till then in the Pacific—and continued throughout the rest of the month. Another factor was Japanese suspicions of an impending Allied move which might call for the use of heavy surface forces. Preparations for that move were then well in hand.

On 5th November Task Force 74, now comprising *Australia*, *Shropshire*, *Ralph Talbot*, *Warramunga*, *Arunta* and *Helm*, was in Milne Bay, whence, in accordance with instructions received from Carpenter, and from Halsey, Commander Third Fleet, it sailed on the 11th for Port Purvis, Florida Island. This move was in response to the further implementation of the ELKTON III Plan by the Allies, with the invasion of Bougainville. From 27th October destroyer transports and landing craft of Rear-Admiral Wilkinson's III Amphibious Force from Guadalcanal and the Russell

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Cdr J. A. Doyle, RD; RANR. HMAS *Kanimbla*; comd HMAS *Seamist* 1941-42, *ML424* 1943, *ML817* 1943-45. Of Sydney; b. Sydney, 21 Jun 1917.

Islands landed 6,300 troops, mostly New Zealanders, with their equipment, on Mono, Treasury Island, where, by 6th November, the small Japanese force was eradicated. On the day of the Allied landing at Mono Island another landing—by 725 officers and men of the I Marine Amphibious Corps—was made on Choiseul, where Seton<sup>5</sup> and Waddell were now the only two coastwatchers in enemy-occupied territory in the Solomons. They guided and fought alongside the marines until the Americans, whose venture there was a large-scale raid, not an invasion, left the island on 4th November.

Seton and Waddell remained on Choiseul until March 1944, when they were withdrawn for well-earned leave after fifteen months on the island. During their stay there they did most valuable work, sending out Intelligence which aided Allied attacks on the Japanese supply lines; guiding Allied aircraft in strikes on the Choiseul Bay area; and rescuing Allied airmen. Their place on Choiseul was taken by coastwatchers Robertson<sup>6</sup> and Andresen. Others were there at various times, but coastwatchers were withdrawn by degrees as the Solomons campaign moved to its conclusion.

The Bougainville campaign, to which the capture of Treasury Island and the raid on Choiseul were preliminaries, was planned by the small staffs of Admiral Halsey at Noumea, of Vice-Admiral Fitch at Espiritu Santo, and of Rear-Admiral Wilkinson and Lieut-General Vandegrift at Guadalcanal. The operation in its place in the ELKTON III Plan was part of the Allied general scheme of manoeuvre to advance the bomber line towards Rabaul. It was planned to establish land-based air forces on Bougainville. These, in conjunction with similar air forces to be established in New Britain, would bring Rabaul and Kavieng within effective range of all types of air attack. Part of the South-West Pacific objective of the ELKTON III Plan—the seizing of the Lae-Salamaua-Finschhafen-Madang area and the occupation of western New Britain—was achieved with the capture of Finschhafen on 2nd October. It was originally planned to seize Madang before invading New Britain, but in a letter to MacArthur dated 31st August 1943, Blamey proposed that the capture of western New Britain should precede that of Madang. He remarked that the Madang operation would entail the moving of forces by sea open to surface and submarine attack once clear of Vitiaz Strait, and that the Lae airfield would bring Cape Gloucester nearer to air cover than Madang. At a conference held by MacArthur at his headquarters three days later<sup>7</sup> both MacArthur and Carpenter stressed the necessity of gaining a strongpoint somewhere along the north coast of New Guinea between Finschhafen and Madang before assaulting western New Britain; and it was decided that Dumpu should be captured, and an airfield established there to provide

<sup>5</sup> Capt C. W. Seton, DCM; AIF. Coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Plantation manager; of Faisi, British Solomon Is; b. Wellingrove, NSW, 14 Jun 1901.

<sup>6</sup> Capt H. W. F. Robertson, AIF. Coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Plantation manager; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 16 Oct 1906. Died Jul 1945.

<sup>7</sup> Present were: MacArthur, and Sutherland and Chamberlin of GHQ; Kenney and Whitehead of the American Air Force; Blamey and Berryman of Allied Land Forces; and Admiral Carpenter and Captain Steinhagen of Allied Naval Forces.



cover for a simultaneous seaborne movement into Saidor in New Guinea and Cape Gloucester in New Britain. Dumpu was captured by the Australians on 4th October. Preparations went ahead for the construction of an airfield there while, in the Solomons, the Soupac forces moved for the construction of their airfields on Bougainville.

On Guadalcanal was a small Australian enclave in otherwise wholly American-occupied territory. This was the coastwatchers' Solomon Islands headquarters, originally established there by Mackenzie in August 1942. It occupied a sizeable camp on the edge of Henderson Field, where Lieutenant Pryce Jones<sup>8</sup> had succeeded Mackenzie in command. It was a truly "Allied" complement, including Australians, British, New Zealanders and Americans of all Services, and a number of native scouts. The A.I.B. group on Guadalcanal was a completely self-contained organisation on the island, with its own administration as a unit of the Allied Intelligence Bureau, responsible, through the Supervising Intelligence Officer, North Eastern Area (Commander Feldt) to the Controller, A.I.B. (Colonel Roberts) and the Director of Naval Intelligence (Commander Long). It had its own recreations and its own social life.<sup>9</sup>

The Guadalcanal A.I.B. group filled an important role in the Bougainville operations in the obtaining of Intelligence, and the reaching of the decision on the landing point. There were about 40,000 Japanese Army troops and about half that number of Navy men on Bougainville and off-lying islands. Some 6,000 were on Buka, about 5,000 in the Shortlands, with those on Bougainville mainly in the southern part of the island. There were enemy airfields on Buka, and at Kahili in southern Bougainville. Three parties of coastwatchers were put in to Bougainville, which had been without coastwatchers since Mason and Read were withdrawn in July 1943. Two of these parties were landed from the American submarine *Guardfish*<sup>1</sup> five days before the assault on the island. One of them, comprising Captain Robinson,<sup>2</sup> A.I.F., and Sub-Lieutenant Bridge, operated in the north of the island. The other, consisting of Lieutenant Keenan,<sup>3</sup> R.A.N.V.R., and Captain Mackie<sup>4</sup> and Sergeant McPhee,<sup>5</sup> A.I.F., operated in the south. The third party, Flight Lieutenant Robinson,

<sup>8</sup> Lt-Cdr I. de J. P. Jones, VD; RANR. HMAS *St Giles*; DSIO, Solomon Is 1943-44. Factory manager; of Sydney; b. 13 Jan 1899.

<sup>9</sup> One of the recreations in the camp was deck tennis, played with quoits over a net rigged between two palm trees. All ranks and ratings joined together in this game, and it is interesting to note that, as was disclosed in the camp censorship of its own personal correspondence, American naval ratings, who were coders and signalmen in the camp, stressed this fact in their letters home, remarking that it was something which would not occur in their own Service.

<sup>1</sup> *Guardfish*, US submarine (1942), 1,526 tons, one 3-in gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 21 kts. *Guardfish* (Lt-Cdr N. G. Ward, USN) was the boat which lifted 83 persons from Bougainville—soldiers, native police, Chinese, loyal natives and coastwatchers—when Mason and Read were withdrawn four months earlier.

<sup>2</sup> Maj E. D. Robinson, MC; AIF. (1st AIF: 30 Bn.) Coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Hotel proprietor (formerly District Officer in NG); of King's Cross, NSW; b. Doncaster, England, 5 Jan 1897. Died 5 Feb 1961.

<sup>3</sup> Lt-Cdr J. R. Keenan, DSC; RANVR. Coastwatcher, AIB. Patrol officer; of Wattle Glen, Vic; b. Canterbury, Vic, 27 Oct 1915.

<sup>4</sup> Maj J. H. Mackie; AIF. 1st Indep Coy, "M" Special Unit. Electrician; of Kyabram, Vic; b. Kyabram, 1 Feb 1919.

<sup>5</sup> Lt G. J. McPhee, MC; AIF. Coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Advertising clerk; of Mosman, NSW; b. Mosman, 26 Sep 1921.

R.A.A.F.; Sub-Lieutenant Stuart,<sup>6</sup> R.A.N.V.R.; Sergeant F. Halveston, Corporal B. F. Nash and Private W. J. Engler of the American Army; Telegraphist T. Withers, R.N.Z.V.R.; and Coders Kissane<sup>7</sup> and Wallader,<sup>8</sup> R.A.N., landed with the marines at the actual assault.

Preliminaries to this, additional to the Treasury and Choiseul assaults, were the heavy air raids carried out by the Fifth Air Force on Rabaul, and on the Bougainville airfields by "Airsols" Command—an *élite* air force with aircraft and fliers of the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps and New Zealand Air Forces—under Major-General N. F. Twining, U.S. Army, with headquarters at Munda. American naval bombardments by both carrier aircraft bombing and surface gunfire also helped to prepare the way for the landing by neutralising Japanese airfields.

The III Amphibious Force, under Rear-Admiral Wilkinson in transport *George Clymer*,<sup>9</sup> of eight attack transports and four attack cargo ships, carrying 14,321 troops of the 3rd Marine Division, with an escort of eleven destroyers, and with minesweepers and minelayers, approached the landing beaches at Cape Torokina, Empress Augusta Bay, at dawn on 1st November. The first waves of landing craft were on the beaches by the appointed hour of 7.30 a.m. with between 7,000 and 8,000 of the invaders. Some toll was taken by artillery and machine-gun fire from the defenders. The landing was almost simultaneous with the first air attack from Rabaul. Good work by defending Airsols fighters minimised the attackers' results and shot a number down, as it did when a second and heavier strike by about 100 enemy planes developed in the early afternoon. All the American troops were on shore and, by 5.30 p.m., eight of the twelve transports were completely unloaded.

The A.I.B. party which landed with the marines quickly set up camp and was "on the air" that afternoon, and established immediate radio contact with the northern party. Keenan's southern group, however, was out of touch for some time owing to teleradio fault. With this rectified, and with the Torokina station receiving Intelligence from the two others, the marines were kept informed of Japanese movements on the island, which made possible Allied bombing causing casualties and disruption of Japanese plans, and enabled interference with enemy coastal barge and shipping movements.

Japanese reaction additional to the air attacks was swift. At 5 p.m. on 1st November Vice-Admiral Omori with two heavy and two light cruisers and six destroyers, sortied from Rabaul. He was to take with him five troop-carrying destroyers with 1,000 troops but, because of delays, these were sent back to Rabaul at 10 p.m. and Omori's force continued on intending to attack the American transports which he believed still

<sup>6</sup> F-O R. Stuart, MC. Coastwatcher, AIB (RANVR 1943-44; served as civilian with XIV American Corps Jun-Dec 1944; RAAF 1944-45). Planter; of Bougainville; b. Mysore, India, 30 Apr 1904.

<sup>7</sup> Ldg Coder J. A. Kissane, 25703. Coastwatcher, AIB. Audit clerk; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 31 Aug 1923.

<sup>8</sup> Ldg Coder P. F. Wallader, 25651. Coastwatcher, AIB. Schoolteacher; of Gympie, Qld; b. Gympie, 23 Jul 1923.

<sup>9</sup> *George Clymer*, US transport (1942), 11,058 tons, 16½ kts.

to be in Empress Augusta Bay; but these had retired thence for the night at 6 p.m. In the meantime an American force was on its way to intercept Omori—Rear-Admiral Merrill's 12th Cruiser Division of four light cruisers, with eight destroyers. The opposing forces met to the west of Empress Augusta Bay about 2.30 a.m. on the 2nd, and in the resulting hour-long battle the Japanese were driven off with the loss of light cruiser *Sendai* and destroyer *Hatsukaze*, while Merrill had one destroyer crippled by a torpedo hit, though she made port safely. The Japanese counter-landing originally planned to be covered by Omori on the night 1st-2nd November was eventually carried out successfully—700 troops to reinforce Buka airfield and 475 at Torokina—in the early hours of 7th November.

It was to strengthen the American naval forces in preparation for possible heavier Japanese surface attacks that Task Force 74 was ordered to Port Purvis, where it arrived on 13th November to operate with the Third Fleet in the Soupac area. But on the 15th of the month it left again for Milne Bay. As Crutchley observed in his "Diary of Proceedings" for November:

Crudiv 9 (*Nashville*, *St Louis*) had been made available to Commander 3rd Fleet and he no longer needed Task Force 74 to support current operations. In fact, Task Force 74 based at Milne Bay would be slightly nearer to Empress Augusta Bay, where operations are currently proceeding, than would be a support force based at Port Purvis.

### III

Back in Milne Bay on 17th November, Task Force 74 settled down to a brief program of exercises. During the year it had experienced periods of much frustrating inactivity, of constant changes in its composition, of depletion of its forces. Never at any time in June 1943, for instance, was it assembled as a complete force. The destroyers, heavily involved in escort duties and docking requirements, were constantly separated and on the move. And, as stated above, at the beginning of October the Task Force comprised one ship only—*Australia*. But a more satisfying period lay ahead. At the beginning of November T.F.74 consisted of *Australia*, *Shropshire*, *Warramunga*, *Arunta*, and U.S.S. *Helm*. During the month the destroyer *Ralph Talbot* reported for duty, and on the 27th the cruiser *Nashville* joined. Operations against New Britain were impending, and in these the Task Force had an important role, as had also the coastwatchers.

The plan (designated DEXTERITY) for the occupation of western New Britain, envisaged the denial to the Japanese of bases there as far as the line Talasea-Gasmata, approximately the western third of the island. The objectives were to provide from the Cape Gloucester area effective general and direct air support for subsequent operations in the Bismarck Archipelago, and to establish control of the Vitiaz Strait area and protect the left flank of Allied operations to the eastward. Initially the occupation of Gasmata six days before that of Cape Gloucester was planned to enable the concentration of maximum close air support from a strip at Gasmata. Later it was decided that air facilities at Gasmata were not required, and

its occupation was dropped from the plan. But in November 1943, MacArthur's senior operations officer, Brigadier-General Chamberlin, the commander of the Sixth Army, General Walter Krueger, and General Kenney and Admiral Barbey, explored the practicability of establishing a P.T. boat base from which light naval forces could operate to protect the south-east flank of the Cape Gloucester invasion force, prevent western New Britain from being supplied via the southern coast, and aid Allied use of Vitiaz and Dampier Straits in future operations. As a result of their recommendations to MacArthur, it was decided to occupy Arawe, and there establish a base before moving against Cape Gloucester.

The American naval historian, S. E. Morison, says that the Arawe attack was conceived as an inducement to MacArthur to cancel the occupation of Gasmata on which he had set his heart.

Admirals Carpender and Barbey put their heads together, looked over the charts and hit on Arawe as a place not difficult to take and so near existing bases that the assault shipping could be used over again for the Cape Gloucester landings. About 23 November General MacArthur directed that Arawe be substituted for Gasmata, with target date 15 December—ten days before Cape Gloucester. The official object of this was declared to be "the establishment of light naval forces"—motor torpedo boats—"to protect the southeastern flank of our forces in the impending seizure of the Gloucester Peninsula". But Morton C. Mumma, who commanded the motor torpedo boats in the Southwest Pacific, would have none of Arawe. . . . He is said to have spent days "camping on Seventh Fleet's doorstep" to protest against setting up a P.T. base at Arawe.<sup>1</sup>

The Arawe operation (DIRECTOR) was planned for 15th December. Instead of an occupation of Gasmata, a naval bombardment of that area was planned, and on 26th November Admiral Crutchley issued his operation plan ("derived from Commander 7th Fleet despatches of 24th-25th November") to Task Group 74.2, his destroyer force. This must have been the last operation initiated by Admiral Carpender as Commander, Seventh Fleet, since on 26th November he was succeeded as such by Vice-Admiral Kinkaid.

Meanwhile, to prepare for the anticipated Japanese reaction to the landings in air attacks from Rabaul, steps were taken to place coastwatcher teleradio parties across New Britain south of the Open Bay-Wide Bay neck of Gazelle Peninsula, to give warning of enemy aircraft. In March 1943 a coastwatcher group of three—Lieutenant Wright,<sup>2</sup> Captain Figgis,<sup>3</sup> and Lieutenant Williams<sup>4</sup>—were put on shore from the American submarine *Greenling*<sup>5</sup> at Cape Orford. Throughout months of strain they remained in the area reporting Japanese air and sea movements. When planning for the western New Britain landings got under way, they were used as the

<sup>1</sup> Morison, Vol VI, p. 372.

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Cdr M. H. Wright, DSC; RANVR. Coastwatcher, AIB. Patrol officer; of Toowoomba, Qld; b. Bendigo, Vic, 21 Dec 1913.

<sup>3</sup> Maj P. E. Figgis, MC; AIF. 2/22 Bn; coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Clerk; of St Kilda, Vic; b. St Mawes, England, 16 Nov 1915.

<sup>4</sup> Capt H. L. Williams, MC; AIF. Coastwatcher, AIB ("Z" and "M" Special Units). Patrol officer; of Essendon, Vic, and New Guinea; b. Melbourne, 24 Apr 1916.

<sup>5</sup> *Greenling*, US submarine (1942), 1,526 tons, one 3-in gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 21 kts.

nucleus of an expanding reporting organisation, and the channel of entry into the island and distribution of newcomers. Malcolm Wright was in over-all charge until the newcomers went to their allotted posts. On the night of 28th September the reinforcements—sixteen Europeans and twenty-seven natives—were landed from the American submarine *Grouper*<sup>6</sup> at a time and place arranged by Wright. Six parties were organised, to be in position by 1st November. Five of them were Wright, Williams, Lieutenant Searle<sup>7</sup> and Sergeant Marsh<sup>8</sup> at Nakanai; Figgis, Lieutenant Johnson,<sup>9</sup> Sergeant Bliss,<sup>1</sup> in the Cape Orford area; Major Roberts,<sup>2</sup> Captain English,<sup>3</sup> Sergeant McEvoy,<sup>4</sup> south of Wide Bay; Captain Bates<sup>5</sup> and Sergeant Gilmore<sup>6</sup> in the Open Bay-Wide Bay neck; and Captains Skinner<sup>7</sup> and Stokie<sup>8</sup> and Corporal Foley<sup>9</sup> in the Open Bay coastal area. The sixth party, Captain Murphy,<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant Barrett,<sup>2</sup> and Sergeant Carlson<sup>3</sup> was destined for the Gasmata area, but it never got into position. On the way it was intercepted by a Japanese patrol, and in the ensuing mêlée Barrett and Carlson were killed, and Murphy was captured.

#### IV

Admiral Crutchley's operation plan for the bombardment of Gasmata—an historic document by reason of its title "Commander Task Force 74—Operation Plan One" (Short Title: CTF74 Opplan One)—called for a bombardment by the destroyers for about 20 minutes at midnight on 29th November of targets in the area embraced by Gasmata, and Lindenhafen about ten miles to the east. Gasmata Harbour lies within a convex curve of islands forming a screen about four miles long and two miles off shore

<sup>6</sup> *Grouper*, US submarine (1942), 1,526 tons, one 3-in gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 21 kts.

<sup>7</sup> Capt L. K. Searle, MC; AIF. Coastwatcher, AIB ("Z" and "M" Special Units). Plantation manager; of Toowoomba, Qld; b. Toowoomba, 30 Jan 1913.

<sup>8</sup> Sgt H. E. Marsh, AIF. 36 Bn; coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Salesman; of Concord, NSW; b. Macksville, NSW, 4 May 1920.

<sup>9</sup> Capt C. K. Johnson, AIF. Angau; coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Industrial chemist; of Lae, NG; b. Grafton, NSW, 26 Dec 1904.

<sup>1</sup> Sgt A. D. Bliss, BEM; AIF. Coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Painter; of Earlwood, NSW; b. Sydney, 22 Mar 1920.

<sup>2</sup> Maj A. A. Roberts, MC; RAAF and AIF. SIO RAAF, Milne Bay 1942-43; coastwatcher, AIB, and Angau. Asst district officer; b. Melbourne, 29 Jul 1904.

<sup>3</sup> Capt W. M. English, MBE; AIF. 2/4 Indep Coy and Angau; coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Patrol officer; of New Britain; b. Adelaide, 28 Feb 1915.

<sup>4</sup> Sgt D. G. McEvoy, BEM; AIF. 2/1 Pnr Bn; coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Bricklayer; of Grafton, NSW; b. Grafton, 5 Sep 1917.

<sup>5</sup> Maj C. D. Bates, MC; AIF. Angau; coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). District Officer; of Rabaul, TNG; b. Uitenhage, South Africa, 4 Aug 1907. Died 1 Jan 1954.

<sup>6</sup> Lt J. L. Gilmore, DCM; AIF. Coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Plantation manager; of Rabaul, TNG; b. Sydney, 21 Aug 1918.

<sup>7</sup> Maj R. I. Skinner, MC; AIF. 2/4 Lt AA Regt; coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Patrol officer; of Grafton, NSW; b. Delungra, NSW, 7 Oct 1914.

<sup>8</sup> Capt L. J. Stokie, MC; AIF. NGVR; coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Plantation manager; of Lilinakai Pltn, Rabaul, TNG; b. Colac, Vic, 12 Dec 1900.

<sup>9</sup> Sgt M. B. Foley; AIF. Coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Grocer's assistant; of Ballarat, Vic; b. Ballarat, 29 Jun 1921.

<sup>1</sup> Capt J. J. Murphy; AIF. Angau; coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Patrol officer; of Otibanda, Papua and Brisbane; b. Gympie, Qld, 12 Mar 1914.

<sup>2</sup> Lt F. A. Barrett, DCM; AIF. 2/1 Pnr Bn; coastwatcher, AIB ("M" Special Unit). Clerk; of Croydon, NSW; b. Sydney, 3 Sep 1911. Killed in action 24 Oct 1943.

<sup>3</sup> Sgt L. T. W. Carlson; AIF. Coastwatcher, AIB ("Z" and "M" Special Units). Presser; of Paddington, NSW; b. Paddington, 3 Apr 1919. Killed in action 24 Oct 1943.

at its greatest distance—Anato Island on the north-west, Gasmata and Dililo Islands, and Awrin on the north-east. This last named is separated by half a mile of water (the main entrance to the harbour) from the tip of a small south jutting peninsula forming an extension of the west bank of the Anwek River. The Gasmata airstrip—used by the Japanese only as an advanced base—ran east-west across the neck of the peninsula. From Gasmata a track followed the coast eastwards, through Ring Ring and Lindenhafen plantations, to Lindenhafen, at the mouth of the Amgen River. The targets for the destroyers were a dump area in the vicinity of the airstrip to the west of the Anwek River mouth, and Ring Ring plantation. Identification of landmarks would be by radar, and aircraft would help with target illumination by flares. The destroyers spent Sunday, 28th November, under way east of Milne Bay calibrating radars and rehearsing the bombardment. At 7.30 a.m. on the 29th the division destroyers left Milne Bay and proceeded to the bombardment area via Kitava Island in the Trobriands, whence departure was taken at 6 p.m. direct across the Solomon Sea at 27 knots to Gasmata. In single column, *Ralph Talbot*, *Helm*, *Warramunga*, *Arunta*, 600 yards between ships, T.G.74.2 approached the New Britain coast towards midnight. As Crutchley subsequently wrote:

The operation . . . was made possible entirely due to SG radar. A comparatively featureless and poorly charted coast was approached at 27 knots on a very dark night, overcast and frequent rain squalls. . . . Comdesron 4 reports that at 15 miles the coast in the vicinity of Gasmata was showing clearly on the PPI of his SG radar and his navigational position was soon established. . . . The selected targets were soon identified on the SG PPI, ships were led accurately on to the pre-determined bombardment lines and the ships opened up within five seconds of scheduled time of commencement. Salute to the SG radar!

The two American ships bombarded Ring Ring plantation with 805 rounds of 5-inch; the Australians fired 909 rounds of 4.7-inch into the dump area west of the river mouth, illuminating their target with 135 rounds of starshell. Two Catalina aircraft of Task Group 73.1 dropped flares for the Ring Ring bombardment, “but owing to the overcast the illumination provided was unsatisfactory”. The bombardment ceased at twenty minutes after midnight, and the force was back in Milne Bay at noon on the 30th.

In his report on the bombardment, Commander Walker said:

No contacts of any sort were made. The operation was carried out without interruption or unusual incidents. Although assigned target areas were thoroughly covered, as reported by Blackcat [Catalina aircraft] no large fires were observed. No retaliatory gunfire, searchlights or other evidence of enemy activity was noted. The entire area had a deserted look. It is not recommended that this bombardment be repeated unless in support of actual landing operations.

Twelve days later Commander Walker returned to the United States for other duties, and his place as Commander Destroyers Task Force 74 was taken by Commander Dechaineux.

While, on 29th November, the destroyers of T.G.74.2 sped across the Solomon Sea on the way to their midnight appointment at Gasmata, H.M.A.S. *Westralia*, in Cairns, spent the day "in arming all landing craft and general preparation for combat". At the end of June she had completed, at Garden Island, her conversion from an Armed Merchant Cruiser to a Landing Ship Infantry. July was spent in training, and the next four months in transporting Australian and American troops to New Guinea from the mainland and in training various units, both Australian and American, in amphibious warfare. Now she was preparing to take part in Phase 1 of operation DEXTERITY—the invasion of western New Britain.

The troops chosen for the Arawe assault were the 112th U.S. Cavalry Regiment, reinforced with anti-aircraft artillery, naval beach party, and other specialist units. The landing force, which had been on garrison duty at Woodlark Island in the Trobriands, was withdrawn thence and concentrated at Goodenough Island in November. In the organisation of the assault forces, mainly units of the Sixth American Army were designated to make the landings, the force being named "Alamo Force". Lieut-General Krueger, Commanding General Sixth Army, was also Commanding General Alamo Force. Admiral Barbey, VII Amphibious Force, was responsible for the over water movement. Ships and craft in the operation were U.S.S. *Conyngham* (Barbey's headquarters ship) and destroyers *Shaw*, *Drayton*, *Mugford*, *Bagley*, *Reid*, *Smith*, *Lamson*, *Flusser*<sup>4</sup> and *Mahan*; the transport group, H.M.A.S. *Westralia* and L.S.D. *Carter Hall*, carrying landing craft and with a total of 1,600 troops; two destroyer transports with a total of 300 troops; two patrol craft and two submarine chasers; and a service group of three L.S.T's and three tugs, with U.S.S. *Rigel*.

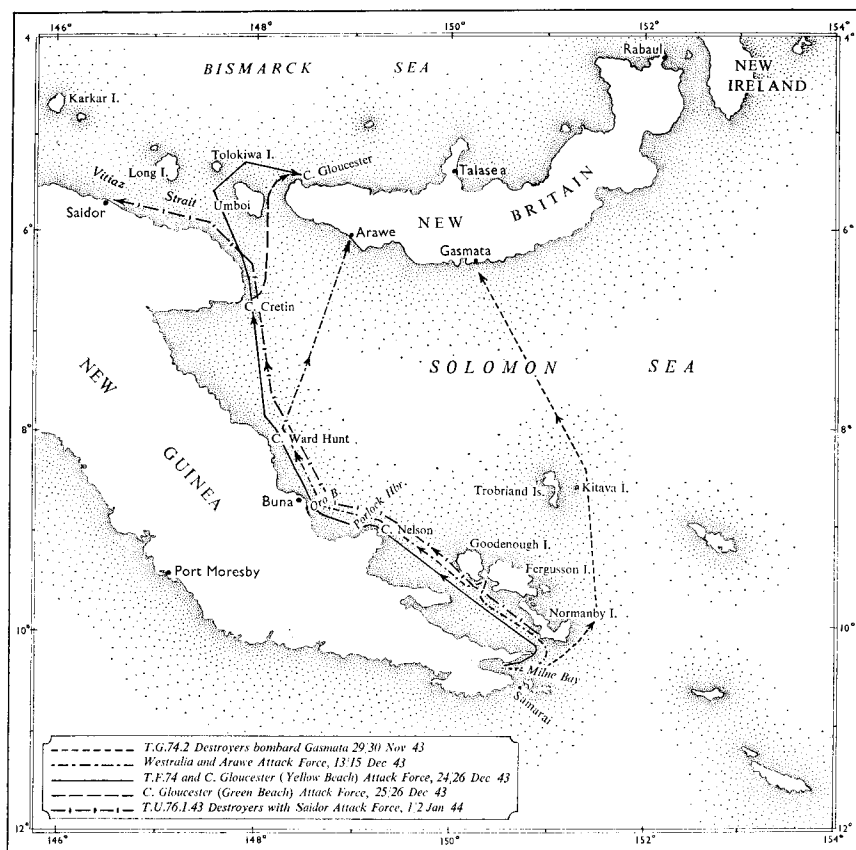
*Westralia* left Cairns on 30th November and entered Milne Bay on 1st December. Here her work of "arming all landing craft" was nullified, because on the 3rd she discharged them all to *Gamododo*, the U.S. Naval Supply Depot, and replaced them with 2 L.S.M's and 16 L.C.V.P's manned by 7 officers and 102 other ranks of the 2nd U.S. Engineer Special Brigade. In company with *Carter Hall* she left Milne Bay on 13th December, and the same day embarked the 112th Cavalry Task Group of 43 officers and 427 men at Goodenough Island. The two ships sailed thence at 1.30 a.m. on the 14th, and that afternoon *Westralia* departed from Buna "as guide of a cruising formation comprising the Arawe Attack Force U.S.S. *Carter Hall*, 10 U.S. destroyers, 2 A.P.D's, 2 P.C's and 2 S.C's. Rear-Admiral Barbey, U.S.N., Commander Task Force 76 and Commander Arawe Attack Force was in destroyer *Conyngham*."<sup>5</sup>

At 4 a.m. on Wednesday, 15th December, *Westralia* stopped in the transport area off the Arawe islands and Commander Knight ordered all landing craft away. An enemy reconnaissance aircraft dropped bombs

<sup>4</sup> *Shaw*, *Drayton*, *Flusser*, US destroyers (1936), 1,500 tons, four 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 36½ kts.

<sup>5</sup> *Westralia* Letter of Proceedings for December 1943.

near U.S.S. *Reid*. Meanwhile two attacks were launched—one successful on Pilelo Island and one abortive on Blue Beach, 5,000 yards east of Arawe—each by a force of 150 men in rubber boats from the A.P.D's. That on Blue Beach was repulsed with casualties of about 50 per cent, and none of the rubber boats reached the beach. Some confusion, and errors in leadership and station-keeping once the landing craft had left



DEXTERITY operation, November 1943-January 1944

the two attack transports, delayed the main landing from half an hour to an hour. It was preceded by a bombardment by destroyers and finally took place under cover of rockets, and bombing and strafing from close-support aircraft. Fortunately it was only lightly opposed, and by mid-afternoon the eastern end of the Arawe peninsula—the day's objective—was secured. Barbey, in his report of the operation, attributed its success largely to the surprise achieved.



The original Gasmata plan provided an excellent although fortuitous cover plan and there is little doubt that the Japanese expected attack at that point. Tactical surprise was gained by skilful navigation through narrow channels and reef infested water to beaches which the enemy apparently considered not necessary to defend in strength.

A feature of the Arawe campaign was the vigorous enemy reaction in the air—probably more violent than to any previous operation in the S.W.P.A. As stated above, the first enemy attack occurred soon after the Allied landing on 15th December, and there were attacks almost every day until the end of the month. On 21st December four separate attacks were made by a total of 113 aircraft. There were few casualties, and damage was mostly to landing craft unloading supplies. In dealing with these attacks, the value of the coastwatchers to the eastward became apparent. As soon as the landing at Arawe was effected, an A.I.B. intercept station was set up, manned by Lieutenant Pendlebury,<sup>6</sup> R.A.N.V.R., as R.A.N. Intelligence Officer, and Lieutenant Archer,<sup>7</sup> formerly of the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles. Pendlebury, reporting on 12th January 1944, to the Director of Naval Intelligence remarked that

our work as an AIB intercept station has been successful. The results achieved to date have justified our presence. . . . All A/C sighting messages transmitted have been intercepted by the station. During the first and second weeks when aerial activity was at its height the intercept messages on several occasions were responsible for the Allied fighter cover being overhead before the arrival of the enemy aircraft. Now that aerial activity over Arawe has diminished considerably there is practically no work for the intercept station. Archer spends most of his time with Angau, whilst I roam around the peninsula and islands keeping in touch with all channels capable of supplying intelligence for the area.

On 15th December the Americans landed at Arawe. Their subsequent nourishment with men and supplies was by destroyer transports from Goodenough, and by L.C.T's from Finschhafen respectively, and by 10th January 1944 totals of 4,750 officers and men and 8,165 tons of supplies had been landed. The L.C.T's and their motor launch escorts were "the heroes of the Arawe operation," said the American naval historian, ". . . faithfully landing their cargoes despite vicious air attacks and lack of protection from their own air force."<sup>8</sup>

The invaders gradually cleared the area of inferior Japanese forces (estimated total Japanese strength from 15th December 1943 to 17th January 1944 was 634, with killed and captured during the period 310) and, by writing on 19th January, Pendlebury reported that he had "practically nothing to do as an N.I.O. . . . At the most the intention appears to be the establishment of Arawe harbour as a PT refuelling base only. . . . AIB activity can be gauged from the fact that the last operational intercept received by us was on 8th January."

<sup>6</sup> Lt R. M. Pendlebury; RANVR. Coastwatcher, AIB. Accountant; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 4 Jul 1912.

<sup>7</sup> Capt G. R. Archer, MC; AIF. NGVR; coastwatcher, AIB ("Z" and "M" Special Units). Gold miner; of Hampton, Vic; b. Murrumbidgee, Vic, 7 Dec 1913.

<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol VI, p. 377.

Two days after the landing at Arawe, on 17th December, Alamo Force received a directive from MacArthur for an operation (MICHAELMAS) to seize the Saidor area on the Rai Coast of New Guinea on or after 2nd January 1944. The operation was planned as an exploitation, its initiation to be contingent on a quick success in New Britain. Plans were immediately prepared, and on 22nd December the Saidor Task Force was established with Brigadier-General C. A. Martin as commander.

## V

Phase two of the New Britain operation, the landing at Cape Gloucester, was carried out on 26th December. Some 45 miles north-west of Arawe, and forming the north-west extremity of New Britain, Cape Gloucester—so named by William Dampier in March 1700<sup>9</sup>—is on a narrow coastal plain sloping to the sea from Mount Talawe's active volcanic cone lifting 6,600 feet five miles inland. Jungle and scattered kunai patches cover the slopes. On level ground at the cape's extremity the Japanese had a 3,900-foot airstrip, with two longer ones under construction, all within 50 yards of the shore. Enemy strength was estimated at about 7,500 troops bivouacked in the vicinity of the airstrip and at Borgen Bay, a staging place for Japanese barge traffic, about eight miles south-east of the cape. During the weeks previous to the assault, Allied reconnaissance teams were inserted into the area by P.T. boats from which they landed in rubber boats;<sup>1</sup> and additional help in briefing, advising on landing beaches, and the preparation of relief models was given by a former resident of Cape Gloucester, Sub-Lieutenant Wiedemann,<sup>2</sup> who joined the Navy on Trafalgar Day 1943, and later landed with the marines on Cape Gloucester at Beach Green. Wiedemann was seized upon when information was sought about the Gloucester area. As he later explained:

I was in the Parish of Kilmore, Victoria, and they wanted anyone who had been on Gloucester. They could not find anyone, so the Sixth Army got in touch with me, and we did a terrain study in Melbourne. Then the next thing they wanted was for me to join up with the Marines as a civilian. Just as they were getting that through, they decided it would be better if I went up with the Marines as a combatant, and it was necessary for me to have a commission to move among the big fellows—generals, etc., so they thought of the Navy. Then they got busy and got things moving, so that I was able to commission, and was attached to

<sup>9</sup> "As we stood over to the Islands, we look'd out very well to the North, but could see no Land that way; by which I was well assur'd that we were got through, and that this East-Land does not join to New Guinea; therefore I named it Nova-Britannia. The North-West Cape, I called Cape Gloucester, and the South-West point Cape Anne; and the North-West Mountain which is very remarkable, I call'd Mount Gloucester." William Dampier, *A Voyage to New Holland* (The Argonaut Press, 1939), p. 216.

<sup>1</sup> In September Sub-Lieut A. Kirkwall-Smith, RANVR, of Ferdinand, spent 12 days at Gloucester with 4 Americans and 4 natives in a reconnaissance operation controlled by VII Amphibious Force. They brought out "information of beaches, terrain, guns, roads, trenches and barbed wire". Similarly coastwatchers, leading VII Amphibious American-native teams, made pre-assault surveys of Arawe (Capt L. Pursehouse, AIF) and Gasmata (Lt L. C. Noakes, AIF). But Commander Feldt later recorded (*The Coastwatchers*, p. 331): "The operations of *Ferdinand* personnel under the control of Amphibious Force had not been an unqualified success. Landings had been made and some information obtained without suffering any casualties, but throughout, owing to lack of knowledge of local conditions by the planners, they had been adventures, not calculated operations."

<sup>2</sup> Sub-Lt Rev W. G. G. Wiedemann; RANVR. C of E clergyman; of Newcastle, NSW; b. Hawthorn, Vic, 14 Apr 1906.

*Lonsdale* for convenience sake. That was going on when we sailed on 26th September 1943, from Port Melbourne. I was brought into the Navy on 21st October 1943.

Another Australian who landed with the marines was Lieutenant Ashton,<sup>3</sup> A.I.F., who set up the A.I.B. intercept station for air raid warnings.

The main Australian participation in the Gloucester operation was by Task Force 74, which provided cover for the assault convoys, and carried out a pre-landing bombardment described by D.N.I. Melbourne in his report to the Admiralty at the time as "perhaps the most significant that has taken place in the S.W.P.A." *Westralia's* participation was in the Reserve Group, which comprised the Australian ship and the Americans *Carter Hall* and cargo ship *Etamin*, with *Westralia* Senior Officer.

Two small beaches, Yellow One and Yellow Two, about midway between the airstrip and Borgen Bay, were selected for the main landing, and a small beach near Tuali (Beach Green) 13,000 yards south-west of Cape Gloucester, was chosen for a secondary landing. D-day was 26th December, in the dark of the moon, and the landing force comprised the 1st Marine Division, with two battalions of aviation engineers, and artillery. The force was formed into three groups, one each for beaches Yellow, and one for beach Green. Transport was by destroyer transports and landing craft. These loaded for Yellow beaches at Cape Sudest, and for Green at Cape Cretin, on Christmas Eve.

Also on Christmas Eve, at 4.30 p.m., Task Force 74 (Rear-Admiral Crutchley) sailed from Milne Bay. It comprised TG74.1, *Australia* (flag), *Shropshire*, and destroyers *Warramunga*, *Arunta*, and U.S.S. *Helm* and *Ralph Talbot*, with Dechaineux in *Warramunga* senior officer destroyers; and TG74.2, U.S. Ships *Phoenix* (Rear-Admiral R. S. Berkey, U.S.N., Second-in-Command TF74), *Nashville*, and destroyers *Bush*, *Ammen*, *Mullany* and *Bache*.<sup>4</sup> At 11.30 a.m. on 25th December the Task Force cleared Cape Ward Hunt and began to overtake the assault echelons from Cape Sudest. Later, in his report, Crutchley told how

Including Task Force 74, the various ships and craft at sea during the day, moving towards Vitiaz Strait, amounted to four cruisers, 22 destroyers, nine APD's, 12 LST's, 16 LCM's, 19 LCT's, 12 ICT's, four submarine chasers, three motor minesweepers, two tugs and one patrol craft, making a total of over 100.

As the ships passed Cape Ward Hunt they were seen and reported by a Japanese coastwatcher, but the enemy apparently thought the convoy was reinforcements for Arawe, and he staged a major air attack there at 9 a.m. next day. The Cape Gloucester landing took him by surprise, and his air reaction there was not until 2.30 p.m. on the 26th.

It was still daylight when the main body entered Vitiaz Strait to make the approach to Gloucester between Umboi Island and Tolokiwa Island, and Task Force 74, with cruisers in column and the eight destroyers formed

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<sup>3</sup> Maj L. E. Ashton; AIF. NGVR; coastwatcher, AIB ("Z" and "M" Special Units). Gold miner and prospector; of Wau, NG; b. Bowen, Qld, 14 Mar 1901.

<sup>4</sup> *Bush*, *Ammen*, *Mullany*, *Bache*, US destroyers (1942-43), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. *Bush* sunk off Okinawa, 6 Apr 1945.

as anti-submarine screen, took station ahead of the assault echelon. While the Task Force was overtaking the Cape Sudest groups earlier in the day, the Beach Green troops at Cape Cretin were preparing to embark "after our Christmas dinner of turkey on the beach", as Wiedemann later recalled. The Cape Cretin echelon, of 16 L.C.M's and 12 L.C.T's, with 1,500 troops, vehicles, guns, and 600 tons of bulk stores, left its loading point during the afternoon of the 25th, and proceeded to its destination through Dampier Strait, escorted by the American destroyers *Reid* and *Smith*. The main convoy kept its cruising formation until Cape Gloucester was abeam, when Task Groups 74.1 and 74.2 separated, the first named to bombard targets in the vicinity of Gloucester airstrip, and 74.2 to bombard Beaches Yellow.

The objects of the bombardments were to destroy enemy installations, to prevent his reorganising counter-measures to the landing, and to silence his artillery. Extensive and lengthy preparations had been made. For the landing, Task Force 74 was placed under the command of Commander Task Force 76 (Admiral Barbey) whose Senior Gunnery Officer, Major Blais, provided detailed gunnery data and advice based upon gunnery requirements. By private arrangement with Admiral Crutchley, four Bombardment Liaison Officers from the Royal Australian Artillery<sup>5</sup> joined the Task Force for training purposes at the end of October. The senior of these—Major Vickery<sup>6</sup>—acted as liaison officer between Crutchley and Barbey for bombardment purposes. Planning began in earnest in the last few days of November, from when all Bombardment Liaison Officers, ships' gunnery officers, and staff officers (Operations) were kept fully informed by Vickery of the progress of planning and the problems to be encountered. As a result of the careful preparations the bombardment went off without a hitch and was most effective.<sup>7</sup>

Exactly on schedule at 6 a.m. on 26th December *Australia*, *Shropshire*, *Warramunga* and *Arunta* opened fire on targets in the airstrip vicinity. The bombardment continued until 7.20 a.m., with the expenditure of over 700 rounds of 8-inch, nearly 900 of 4.7-inch, and nearly 100 rounds of 4-inch high explosive. During an hour from 6.25 a.m., *Nashville* and

<sup>5</sup> Maj N. A. Vickery, RAA, 2 i/c Naval Bombardment Group (*Australia*); Capt H. A. Manning, RAA (*Shropshire*); Capt J. S. Elder, RAA (*Nashville*); Capt D. A. Calder, RAA (*Phoenix*).

<sup>6</sup> Maj-Gen N. A. Vickery, MBE, MC, ED; AIF, 2/1 Fd Regt; 1 Naval Bombardment Group. Clerk; of North Sydney; b. Lakemba, NSW, 28 Jul 1917.

<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the results in the invasion of the Gilbert Islands in November. Writing of the naval bombardment of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll, Morison, Vol VII (*Aleutians, Gilberts and Marshalls, June 1942-April 1944* (1952)), pp. 157-8, says:

"Two and a half hours of gunfire from three battleships, four cruisers and a number of destroyers, throwing about 3,000 tons of naval projectiles was expected to knock out Betio shore defences and leave the defenders dazed and groggy. This was a gross miscalculation. Nobody realised how much punishment Japanese could take when protected by several thicknesses of coconut logs and coral sand. There should have been at least three times as much gunfire, supplemented by 2000-pound bombs dropped by Liberators, and by vertical fire from rockets or mortars. Close-range naval gunfire has too flat a trajectory to wreck a low, flat island."

In his report of 31st December 1943, "Naval Bombardment Executed by Task Force 74 during operation Dexterity, 26th December 1943", Major Vickery, writing of the early stages of planning, 2nd December, said: "There was a generally unsettled atmosphere about the planning at this stage. Confidence in naval bombardment as a neutralising and destructive medium had been shaken by the failure in the Gilberts, and rather than carrying out a careful diagnosis of the causes and avoiding the same pitfalls, resort was being made to air cover as a means of close support on the beaches. At this stage the measure savoured of panic, as no effort had been made to tie 5th Air Force down to a commitment, nor had the density of the cover required been expressed."

*Phoenix*, in the vicinity of Yellow Beaches, fired over 1,600 rounds of 6-inch. The destroyers also bombarded in the Borgen Bay area, while *Reid* and *Smith* prepared the way for the Green Beach landing with a similar bombardment. The naval bombardments were followed by heavy bombing attacks at all beaches. Wiedemann, who landed at Beach Green in the second wave, testified to the efficiency of the naval bombardment:

We landed. The naval bombardment at Gloucester itself did a wonderful job. On Beach Yellow, 1 and 2, practically everything in the way of timber was mown to the ground for the distance of about 400 yards inland. Hardly a thing standing. The bombing did not effect that a great deal, mostly the naval gunfire.

At this bombardment *Shropshire* established the reputation she was to maintain for the excellence of her radar and its operation. The American naval historian recorded of the bombardment:

The Aussies turned in a better radar performance than our ships. H.M.A.S. *Shropshire* had a radar with a tilting antenna and two "hot" operators who could pick up planes against a land background.<sup>8</sup>

The 7th Marine Regiment headed the assault, and landed at Beach Yellow a minute after 7.30 a.m., unopposed. By 10.30 a.m. the Commanding General, Major-General William H. Rupertus, established his command post between the two beaches. The first enemy resistance, encountered on the slopes of Target Hill on the northern arm of Borgen Bay, was quickly overcome, and by noon that section of the beach-head was secured. By the end of the day 12,500 troops and 7,600 tons of supplies had been landed at Cape Gloucester. Simultaneously with the landings there, a landing was made on Long Island by a company of the American 2nd Engineer Special Brigade, to prepare an area suitable for light amphibious craft, and establish air warning facilities. There were no Japanese on the island.

Japanese reaction by air to the assault on Cape Gloucester was slow. A large flight of aircraft, detected by radar at 9 a.m., had Arawe as its target—a result of the wrong enemy conclusion as to the convoy's destination when it was sighted off Cape Ward Hunt on Christmas Day. The first enemy air attack in the Cape Gloucester area on 26th December was at 2.30 p.m., by 20 dive bombers and 50 or 60 fighters from Rabaul. Defending fighters intercepted, but about 10 enemy bombers got through and attacked American destroyers off Cape Gloucester. U.S.S. *Brownson*<sup>9</sup> was sunk and three others damaged. A second air attack developed at 5.15 p.m. when 10 torpedo bombers attacked a returning convoy of L.S.T's. "Every bomber in this group was shot down by the air cover before closing the ships. In all, the enemy had 64 aircraft destroyed on D-day."<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, Task Force 74, its bombardment mission completed, was released by Barbey at 8.30 a.m. on the 26th and proceeded to Buna. There

<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol VI, p. 384.

<sup>9</sup> *Brownson*, US destroyer (1943), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. Sunk off New Britain, 26 Dec 1943.

<sup>1</sup> "Report on Cape Gloucester Operation", by Commander 7th Amphib Force, 13 Feb 1944.

the cruisers remained until the end of the month, while the destroyers carried out escort work and covering patrols off Cape Gloucester where, on the last day of the year, the American flag was hoisted. Bad weather set in on 29th December and ended enemy air activity for the time being, and the ban was extended by Airsols attacks on Rabaul, which increased in intensity in the New Year until, by the end of February 1944, the Allies had air mastery over the Bismarcks. But heavy land fighting—against both nature and the Japanese—lay ahead before Allied control of Cape Gloucester and the straits was secured on 16th January 1944. In the days between landing and victory at Gloucester

the Marines lost 248 killed (25 of them by huge falling trees) and 772 wounded. Every veteran in the 1st Division swore that Cape Gloucester was worse than Guadalcanal, for the rain never let up. This was one operation in which nature proved to be a worse enemy than the Japanese.<sup>2</sup>

Of the defending Japanese, 3,100 were known to have been killed.

A week after the landing at Cape Gloucester, on Sunday, 2nd January 1944, the third and final phase of the operation was initiated with the landing of the Saidor Task Force, consisting of the reinforced 126th Regimental Combat Team. The Task Force, of 2,400 troops, was transported in destroyer transports, L.C.I's and L.S.T's from Goodenough Island. A destroyer force which included those of Task Force 74 escorted and supported the convoy. Captain Dechaineux in *Warramunga*, S.O. of Task Unit 76.1.43—H.M.A. Ships *Warramunga* and *Arunta* and U.S. Ships *Ralph Talbot* and *Helm*—described the landing in his Report of Proceedings:

This unit had orders to take station 12 miles ahead of the most advanced echelon by 1800 1st January. In actual fact all echelons were ahead of schedule and station was not made until 1900. Thereafter this unit proceeded at 12 knots spread 1,000 yards apart right angles to the line of advance, 285 degrees. . . . At 0600 2nd January this unit patrolled in diamond formation, distance apart of ships 1,000 yards along 290 degrees—110 degrees line about 10 miles north of Saidor. The weather at this time was sea calm, variable winds with scattered rain squalls. The first flight hit the beach at 0700 after a bombardment by US destroyers. There was no opposition from shore. From about 0745 both medium and heavy US bombers made a most impressive attack on the Saidor bivouac area dropping about 250 tons of bombs.

By 3rd January the Saidor area with its landing strip was in Allied possession, and reinforcements of troops and supplies were brought in without enemy interference. Possession of the airstrip at its western entrance, tightened the Allied grip on Vitiaz Strait. The occupation of Saidor also cut the line of retreat of the 12,000 Japanese who were now beginning to hurry from Sio, some 600 miles to the eastward, in the face of the Australians advancing along the coast of Huon Peninsula.<sup>3</sup> Sio was

<sup>2</sup> Morison, Vol VI, p. 388.

<sup>3</sup> "The Japanese were now being shot at from all quarters. For the past three days Mitchells, Marauders, Kittyhawks and Thunderbolts had been attacking the enemy's hideouts and supply routes along the coast, Nambariwa [just south of Sio] being the main target. The Japanese commanders knew that their line of retreat had been effectively cut at Saidor. The plight of the numerous bands of enemy encountered inland by the Papuan and Australian patrols was pitiable; sick, hungry, and often without weapons, they had no chance." D. S. Dexter, *The New Guinea Offensives* (1961), p. 733, in the army series of this history.

occupied by the 2/17th Battalion A.I.F. on 15th January, and four weeks later, on 10th February, the Australians advancing from Sio made junction with the American garrison at Saidor. That same day the DEXTERITY operation terminated, when elements of the 1st Marine Division from Cape Gloucester met patrols of the Arawe Task Force in the village of Gilnit on the Itne River, thus establishing Allied control over the western tip of New Britain.

## VI

The termination of the DEXTERITY operation saw the virtual attainment of the objectives of the ELKTON III Plan. But there was one change in the ultimate purpose—that of preparing the way for an assault on Rabaul. MacArthur's plans for the capture of Rabaul were not approved at the Quadrant Conference at Quebec in August. Instead, it was decided to neutralise Rabaul, to bypass and cut off that fortress with its large enemy garrison (ultimately of some 100,000, about one-third of whom were naval) and vast quantities of supplies. For it had now become another Singapore, and of it could be said what Admiral Richmond said of Singapore and its fall in 1942:

Unless aid could have come in a shape in which it could deprive the enemy, and secure for the British, the sea communications of the invading and defending forces respectively, the fall of Singapore, sooner or later, was inevitable; as the fall of every isolated fortress on land or at sea has been inevitable throughout the whole history of war.<sup>4</sup>

Such aid was now denied to the Japanese at Rabaul as it was denied to the British at Singapore; and, coincidental with the American landings at Cape Gloucester at the end of 1943, a weapon was forged on Bougainville with which to belabour Rabaul. By Christmas Day 1943 the American perimeter on Bougainville had a radius of around 9,000 yards from Cape Torokina; and within that area on Christmas Day the main objective of the Bougainville operation was attained with the completion of a big bomber strip above the forks of the Piva River. The Piva strip became operational with the launching of a fighter strike on Rabaul on 27th December, and in January 1944 it accommodated dive bombers and torpedo bombers, and Airsols began an increasingly intense air assault on Rabaul which soon reduced the Japanese base to impotence.

The decision to bypass Rabaul, leaving the fruit on the vine to fall without the cost of picking when the Japanese nation surrendered, was a wise one. Nothing was lost by so leaving it, but the cost to the Allies of an assault would have been high. Shoji Ohta and Shiro Hara, respectively supply officer and staff officer with the Japanese *Eighth Area Army*, said in post-war interrogations:

Our forces constructed strong cave defences in the strategic area around Rabaul, namely, the area set off by the Keravat River, Warangoi River, Cape Gazelle, Duke of York group, Cape Tawui and Watom Island. Military supplies were prepared

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<sup>4</sup> Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power* (1946), pp. 327-8.

for immediate use in combat, units were trained and arrangements were made so that in case of an enemy landing at any point, it would be possible to concentrate swiftly a large force at the landing point and to annihilate the enemy on the beaches. . . . We felt that we could still put up a strong fight against an enemy attempt to capture Rabaul. Especially in April 1944 after the main force of the 17th Division from the western New Britain area was concentrated in Rabaul, our confidence rose with the progress of the campaign preparations. Should the Australian forces attack Rabaul, we planned to fight a decisive battle. By the beginning of 1945 we were confident that we could win such a battle. Even if we could not win a victory, we believed that we could kill and wound at least about 100,000 Australians.

The superior conditions existed on Rabaul after the latter part of 1944, such as the heavy concentration of troops, the abundance of ordnance and ammunition, the thoroughness of training, the perfection of fortifications etc., which could hardly be duplicated in any theatre during the entire Pacific war.<sup>5</sup>

In the early stages of the Allied air attacks on Rabaul the Japanese fought back with fighter aircraft, which they reinforced from carriers and from Truk, so that they were able to put up between 40 and 80 to intercept each Allied strike. But on 17th February fell another of the fruits of the Quadrant Conference, and one which hastened Rabaul's fate. At that conference it was decided that operations against the Japanese in the Pacific should be in a dual advance. MacArthur was to neutralise Rabaul; capture Kavieng, the Admiralty Islands, and Wewak; and advance to the Vogelkop Peninsula, the western "head" of the New Guinea bird. Nimitz, in the Central Pacific, was to seize the Gilbert and Marshall Islands, Ponape, Truk, and either the Palau or Marianas Islands, or both. It was in the implementation of this over-all plan that on 17th February 1944 the Americans staged what was one of the most successful carrier operations of the war in an air attack on Truk. So devastating were its results in the destruction of ships in the harbours, aircraft in the air and on the ground, and supplies, that they caused the Japanese high command to abandon the air defence of Rabaul. On 19th February 1944, two years to the day after the heavy initial Japanese air attack on Darwin, the last big air battle was fought over Rabaul. It was fought when 91 American bombers, escorted by 103 fighters, attacked Lakunai and Tobera airfields with bombs and rockets. Fifty Japanese fighters intercepted, out of which "perhaps a dozen were shot down; we lost one Corsair". This interception on the 19th was the swan song of Vice-Admiral Kusaka, Commander of *XI Air Fleet* at Rabaul. Next day all operative fighter aircraft left for Truk, and only 30 damaged "Zekes" and 26 bombers were left.<sup>6</sup>

The Gilberts were secured, after a bloody fight, between the 19th and 29th November 1943. About 200 ships, carrying or escorting 27,600 assault and 7,600 garrison troops, 6,000 vehicles, and 117,000 tons of cargo, took part. There were two attack forces. The northern, for Makin atoll, was commanded by Rear-Admiral Turner of Guadalcanal fame, and was of 6 transports with the 27th Infantry Division, 4 battleships, 4 cruisers and 3 escort carriers. The southern, for the attack on Tarawa, was

<sup>5</sup> From post-war interrogations of the Japanese.

<sup>6</sup> Morison, Vol VI, p. 403.



commanded by Rear-Admiral H. W. Hill, and comprised 16 transports with the 2nd Marine Division—"the best unit that the United States had ever sent into an amphibious operation"—3 battleships, 5 cruisers, 5 escort carriers and 21 destroyers. Six heavy carriers and 5 light carriers, 6 new battleships, 6 cruisers and 21 destroyers, under Rear-Admiral C. A. Pownall—"the greatest carrier force hitherto assembled"<sup>7</sup>—provided cover and air striking forces. Air strikes on the Gilberts were also staged by land-based aircraft operating from Nukufetau and Funafuti in the Ellice Islands, and from Canton in the Phoenix group. The capture of Butaritari Island of Makin atoll cost the ground troops 64 killed and 150 wounded, but the navy paid far more heavily, and the United States "relatively dearer for Makin than for Tarawa" though the fighting was more bitter and bloodier in the south. Butaritari "was defended by very few guns and less than 800 men", and, "counting the naval casualties the enemy exacted at least one American life for each of his".<sup>8</sup> Most of the navy's 687 officers and men killed were in the carrier *Liscome Bay*,<sup>9</sup> flagship of three escort carriers in a task group, which blew up after being hit by a submarine's torpedo, with the loss of 644, including the rear-admiral and ship's captain. The other 43 were killed when a turret exploded in the battleship *Mississippi* during the pre-landing bombardment. The balance was reversed at the Tarawa assault. There the taking of Betio Island—after heavy surface bombardments—cost the marines dearly. They lost 980 killed at Tarawa, to the navy's 29 officers and men. Of the total of 18,313 of both Services engaged there, casualties were 3,110, equalling 17 per cent. It was the ineffectiveness of the pre-landing bombardment there which raised doubts as to the value of a surface bombardment at Cape Gloucester a month later. But the careful planning and the cooperation through the Bombardment Liaison Officers resulted in a different story at New Britain.<sup>1</sup>

The taking of the Gilberts was of importance not only as the first Central Pacific forward move and the securing of a position of strategic value, but because of the lessons learned there. Summing up, the American naval historian concluded:

Ignorance of how to tackle a strongly defended coral atoll surrounded by a fringing reef was responsible for most of the errors in this attack. The principal mistakes were a naval bombardment that was not long, heavy or accurate enough; a badly timed air bombardment before the landing, and badly executed air support of troops; too few amphibtracs and they not good enough. . . . Tarawa cost . . . the lives of 980 Marines and 29 sailors. Not one died in vain, nor did the 2,101 men wounded in action and who recovered, suffer in vain. Every man there, lost or maimed, saved at least ten of his countrymen as the Navy plunged deep into enemy waters and sailed irresistibly on through Micronesia.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Morison, Vol VII, p. 116.

<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol VII, p. 134.

<sup>9</sup> *Liscome Bay*, US aircraft carrier (1943), 7,800 tons, one 5-in gun, 28 planes, 19 kts. Sunk off Makin I, 24 Nov 1943.

<sup>1</sup> Admiral Turner, in a report "Lessons Learned at Tarawa" dated 30th November 1943, stressed the importance of bombardment training, and remarked that "observation of the firing at Makin shows that with more care and training the effectiveness of the bombardment ought to be increased 50 per cent".

<sup>2</sup> Morison, Vol VII, p. 182-6.

A number of Australian, New Zealand and Gilbert Islands merchant service officers and seamen and some civilians took part—as members of Admiral Turner's V Amphibious Force—in the Gilbert Islands operations. The presence of some of them was organised by Lieut-Commander Heyen<sup>3</sup> who, in August 1943 while serving as Naval Recruiting Officer, Melbourne, was seconded to the U.S. Navy and reported to Seventh Fleet Headquarters in Brisbane. There he was requested to obtain the services of any seamen or civilians who had good knowledge of the Gilbert Islands. He did so in Sydney and in Suva, on his way to Pearl Harbour. Others were recruited in New Zealand and Fiji by American Naval Intelligence. In all 16, half of whom were civilians, joined V Amphibious Force between 12th September and 7th October 1943.

The seagoing members were Lieutenant Forbes,<sup>4</sup> R.N.Z.N.R. (ex-master Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony ships), Lieutenant E. Harness, R.N.Z.N.R. (Harbour Master, Suva, and former master of a G. and E. I. C. yacht), Commander Heyen (ex-master British Phosphate Commission ship), Private F. Narruhn (Fijian Military Forces, ex-seaman and engineer in island ships), Lieutenant Page,<sup>5</sup> R.N.Z.N.R. (ex-master of London Missionary Society's ship *John Williams V*), Lieutenant Reymond,<sup>6</sup> R.A.N.R. (ex-second mate Burns Philp and Company), Captain K. A. Tschaun (ex-master, Burns Philp and Company), Lieutenant Webster<sup>7</sup> (ex-master G. and E. I. C. ships).

In a letter to the author, Commander Heyen wrote:

On arrival at Pearl Harbour on 10th September 1943 I reported to V Amphibious Force H.Q. and joined the staff of Rear-Admiral Richmond Kelly (Terrible) Turner, who had just completed the Guadalcanal campaign. Incidentally, from two years close association with him in planning and combat operations, I venture the opinion that, although a strict and at times fearsome disciplinarian, he was one of the finest seamen, most likeable of men, and certainly the greatest leader and fighting admiral I have known. I was then assigned to 5th Phibfor Intelligence, under Captain B. O. Wells, U.S.N.

Meantime, U.S.N. Intelligence in New Zealand had recruited Captains G. J. Webster, J. Forbes and S. S. Page. All three joined the R.N.Z.N.R. as lieutenants, as did Ted Harness. In Fiji, Narruhn was recruited. Both he and Reymond, sons of island traders, were born and brought up in the Gilberts.

All these seamen, with several civilians, joined 5th Phibfor between 12th September and 7th October. There were 16 of us all told, and our Yankee friends promptly dubbed us the Foreign Legion. We participated in the planning of operation GALVANIC—the invasion of the Gilberts—and then split up for the actual operation. Harness, Reymond, Narruhn and I were retained on Admiral Turner's staff in the Northern Attack Force against Butaritari; the others were assigned to the Southern Attack Force (Rear-Admiral Harry Hill) which went in against Tarawa, by far the harder and bloodier assault. D-day was 20th November American time—21st Australian time.

<sup>3</sup> Lt-Cdr G. H. Heyen, RD; RANR. HMS *Kanimbla*; attached V Amphibious Force 1943-44, HQ Comd Amphibious Forces Pacific 1944-45. Master mariner; of Hampton, Vic; b. Birkenhead, SA, 30 May 1900.

<sup>4</sup> Lt J. Forbes, RNZNR. Master mariner; of Auckland; b. 31 Jan 1903.

<sup>5</sup> Lt S. S. Page, RNZNR. Master mariner; b. Somerset, England, 17 Oct 1903.

<sup>6</sup> Lt B. P. Reymond, RANR. Comd HMAS *Alatna* 1944; SRD. Merchant ship's officer; b. Gilbert Is, 15 Mar 1914. Presumed dead, 1 Nov 1944.

<sup>7</sup> Lt G. J. Webster, RNZNR. Master mariner; b. Edgbaston, England, 16 Sep 1910.

The operation was completed 10 days later. All ex-merchant service personnel acted as pilots, nautical advisers, stevedores and, where qualified, interpreters. Officially, the Legion was disbanded on 30th November, but Tschaun, Page, Forbes and Webster stayed on for some time as port pilots at Tarawa. Harness did the same at Funafuti.

Reymond, Narruhn and I returned to Pearl Harbour to prepare for FLINTLOCK, the Marshall Islands campaign. We took part in the capture of Kwajalein and Eniwetok, 31st January 1944 to 23rd February. Reymond then returned to Australia, Narruhn to Fiji, while Admiral Turner obtained Naval Board assent to retain me on his staff for the duration. I became his "trouble-shooter", call sign "Slap Happy", and had varied assignments: pilotage, stevedoring, beach reconnaissance, combat hydrographic surveying, pre-invasion beach Intelligence flights, photographic interpreter, and even first wave guide. A grand life! Went through the campaigns at Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Palau, then a short brush in the Philippines. At the end of the war I was at Manila aboard the *Eldorado*,<sup>8</sup> Flagship of (full) Admiral Turner, who was then Commander of Amphibious Forces, Pacific. My job was O.I.C. Beach Studies Section, preparing data for the invasion of Kyushu, set for November 1945. After the armistice I went to Pearl aboard *Eldorado*, and when Phibspac was disbanded as a fighting force, returned to Australia, November 1945.

## VII

While the Gilbert Islands operations were in progress, the Allied leaders conferred in a series of three important conferences at Cairo and Teheran. The first of these, from 22nd to 26th November at Cairo, was between British, American and Chinese—Churchill, Roosevelt and Generalissimo and Madame Chiang Kai-shek, with their respective staffs and advisers. At its conclusion the British and Americans went to Teheran where, from 28th to 30th November there was "a supreme conference between the three heads of the Governments of the three main powers". From Teheran the British and Americans returned to Cairo to discuss, from 3rd to 6th December, "what was purely Anglo-American business about the war in the Indian Ocean, which was certainly urgent".<sup>9</sup> This question of the war in the Indian Ocean centred upon an American desire for the British to reconquer Burma to support Chinese armies in the vicinity of Chungking. Burma had been briefly discussed at the Anglo-American conference in London in July 1942. The urgency of the need for action there was stressed by the Americans at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943. Churchill told Clement Attlee (his deputy in London) and the War Cabinet in a message from Casablanca on 18th January:

The whole field of the war is being surveyed theatre by theatre. Admiral King of course considers the Pacific should be a first charge on all resources, and both American Army and Navy authorities are very keen on more vigorous action in Burma to help China, culminating in a large-scale "Anakim" [Burma] later in the year.<sup>1</sup>

It was agreed at Casablanca to aim at the capture of Akyab before May 1943, and a provisional date of 15th November 1943 was fixed for an assault on Burma, subject to a review of forces available in July. The

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<sup>8</sup> *Eldorado*, US amphibious force command ship (1944), 7,234 tons.

<sup>9</sup> Churchill, Vol V, p. 282.

<sup>1</sup> Churchill, Vol IV, p. 606.

Americans undertook to supply and man much of the assault shipping and landing craft, and to help with naval covering forces in this November assault. In February 1943 Madame Chiang Kai-shek was in Washington, and addressed pleas for help to a joint session of Congress. In May, at the TRIDENT Conference in Washington, Roosevelt stressed the importance of keeping China in the war, and the Americans reaffirmed their desire for a full-scale advance into Burma from Assam—"contrary to all administrative possibilities", the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Alan Brooke,<sup>2</sup> remarked in his diary on 20th May. Meanwhile an attempt to take Akyab by an advance down the Arakan coast had met with failure, and the British were forced back to the Indian frontier. Now, in May, the rains put an end to operations, including the first Chindit campaign which, organised and conducted by Brigadier Wingate,<sup>3</sup> promised success in operations behind the Japanese lines in Burma.

It was, apparently, at the TRIDENT Conference that the idea of an amphibious operation against the tip of Sumatra, long nursed by Mr Churchill, was given birth. He opposed the American project of re-conquering Burma by land as like "munching a porcupine quill by quill".<sup>4</sup> This thought of the Prime Minister's possibly also was the germ of the subsequent BUCCANEER project, an amphibious assault on the Andaman Islands, for in a paper he prepared during the sea voyage to the conference, Churchill wrote:

The surest way to make a successful landing is to go where you are not expected. It should be possible to carry up to thirty thousand or forty thousand men across the Bay of Bengal, as required, to one or more points of the crescent from Moulmein to Timor. This crescent would include: (i) the Andaman Islands; (ii) Mergui, with Bangkok as objective; (iii) the Kra Isthmus; (iv) the assault of Northern Sumatra; (v) the southern tip of Sumatra; (vi) Java.<sup>5</sup>

Brooke, on the voyage over to TRIDENT, was also considering the Burma question and "lines on which we are to approach our American friends to inform them that the re-conquest of Burma in 1943-44 is not possible". Finally, the Combined Chiefs of Staff report on TRIDENT, as amended and approved by Churchill and Roosevelt, defined the "Overall Strategic Concept for the Prosecution of the War" as an undertaking to bring about the defeat of the Axis in Europe as soon as possible while maintaining and extending unremitting pressure against Japan and, specifically in regard to the Far Eastern War, to "undertake such measures as may be necessary and practicable in order to aid the war effort of China as an effective ally and a base for operations against Japan".

<sup>2</sup> Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, KG, GCB, OM, DSO. GOC II Corps BEF 1939-40; C-in-C Home Forces 1940-41; CIGS War Office 1941-46. B. 23 Jul 1883, Died 17 Jun 1963.

<sup>3</sup> Maj-Gen O. C. Wingate, DSO. Comd Long Range Penetration Gps, Burma, 1943-44. Regular soldier; b. Naini Tal, UP, India, 26 Feb 1903. Killed in aircraft accident, 24 Mar 1944.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Brooke's diary, 22nd April 1943, quoted by Bryant in *The Turn of the Tide*, p. 603. But of the Sumatra idea Brooke later wrote in his diary entry of 8th August on the voyage across the Atlantic in *Queen Mary* to the QUADRANT Conference: "This was, I think, the first day on which Winston began to develop his deep affection for the northern tip of Sumatra. It became an obsession with him somewhat similar to Trondheim in the early days."

<sup>5</sup> Churchill, Vol IV, p. 703.

Burma also figured prominently in the discussions at the Quebec Conference in August. The Prime Minister pushed his plan for a landing in northern Sumatra, operation CULVERIN—but it gained no support from Brooke, nor from the Americans. Churchill stated his views to the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 20th August:

I remain absolutely where I was at the last Conference, and where we all were, that a campaign through Rangoon up the Irrawaddy to Mandalay and beyond would be most detrimental and disadvantageous to us. The capture of Akyab without such a campaign is only an act of waste and folly. . . . The situation I wish to have at this time next year is that we are masters of "Culverin", that Wingate is in touch with the Chinese in Yunnan, that the communications in Upper Burma have been improved as far as possible, and that we have a free option where to strike next amphibiously, having regard to the reactions from the enemy, which by then will have been apparent.<sup>6</sup>

The upshot of the QUADRANT (Quebec in August) Conference, so far as Burma was concerned, was that Lord Louis Mountbatten, whose appointment as Supreme Commander, South-East Asia, was agreed to by the Americans at the conference, would prepare an attempt to reopen land communications with China and harass the Japanese in Burma by a new long-range penetration, supplied by air, by Wingate's Chindits.

It was at the Quebec Conference that the approaching illness of Britain's First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, first manifested itself. In a day's break on 12th August he was one of a small fishing party, and "this was the first day on which we noticed signs of failing on the part of Dudley Pound", recorded Brooke in his diary. "He seemed completely exhausted." A few days later he suffered a stroke, and early in September, in Washington, he tendered his resignation to Churchill. He died in England on Trafalgar Day, 21st October 1943, and on 27th October his ashes—together with those of Lady Pound who had died in July—were buried at sea in the English Channel. Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, who succeeded Pound as First Sea Lord, wrote:

When the war came in September 1939, it cannot be doubted that Dudley Pound was the right man in the right place. For four most difficult years of trial and disappointment he bore the brunt and responsibility of the war at sea. Fearless and outspoken, he stood like a rock against the waves of adversity. They beat against him in vain, leaving him unshaken and unmoved, even in the face of criticism in Parliament and the press, some of it cruelly unjust and bitter, when the tide of the war at sea was running against us. His many trials left him brave, confident and unperturbed, while planning steadily for the victory that he knew must come. I am glad to think that the dawn of victory was already creeping up over the horizon before he died.<sup>1</sup>

A major matter discussed at the QUADRANT Conference was the part the British were to play in the war against Japan, and there was some friction between the British and American Chiefs of Staff on the issue that Britain demanded a full and fair place in the war against Japan from the

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<sup>6</sup> Churchill, Vol V, p. 79.

<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, p. 584.

moment when Germany was beaten. Churchill was firm on this matter of participation (though he differed from his Chiefs of Staff as to its method) and later recalled:

In the end the Americans gave way. My friends on the Chiefs of Staff Committee had been pressed by me to fight this point . . . to the utmost limit, because at this stage in the war what I most feared was that American critics would say "England, having taken all she could from us to help her beat Hitler, stands out of the war against Japan and will leave us in the lurch". However, at the Quebec Conference this impression was effectively removed.<sup>2</sup>

Similar thoughts were in the minds of Australian leaders at this time. In the House of Representatives on 14th October 1943 Dr Evatt said that Churchill and Roosevelt had "come to regard the 'beat Hitler first' slogan not as a major solvent of every difficulty but merely as a general guide to action", and that they had been ready to recognise the tremendous danger of Japanese political as well as military infiltration into territories captured and temporarily occupied. Speaking of Australia's attitude, Evatt referred to an indication by Churchill that he favoured the establishment of a system of subordinate regional councils within the framework of a world organisation, and continued:

Such reference . . . brings me to another vital part of our foreign relationships. While Australia's interest in the future of Europe is undoubted, it is obvious that our predominant interest must lie in the Pacific regions. . . . During the war we have rightly insisted on the importance of the Pacific as a theatre of war. . . . In whatever claims this country has made in relation to the prosecution of the war against Japan we have been animated by not merely a resolution to defend Australia and its territories, but also a determination to maintain the prestige of the British Commonwealth in areas where Japanese military occupation and political infiltration have subjected the United Nations to tremendous risks. Whilst, therefore, we are firmly of opinion that the time has passed when either the peace or prosperity of mankind can be regarded as divisible, and one continent or one nation can be treated in isolation from another we also feel that, because of our special geographical position, and our growing responsibility, and power, we can, and should, make a very special contribution towards the establishment and maintenance of the peace settlement in South-East Asia and the Pacific.<sup>3</sup>

Mountbatten's appointment as Supreme Commander, South-East Asia (with the acting rank of admiral), was made public on 25th August. His directive was approved by Mr Churchill on 21st October. His prime duty was to engage the Japanese as closely and continuously as possible, obliging an enemy diversion from the Pacific theatre and wearing him down by attrition. And he was to maintain and broaden Allied contacts with China both by the air route and by direct contact through northern Burma. He was to plan major amphibious operations for 1944, and at least four weeks before the first of these he would be furnished "with a battle fleet to be based on Ceylon, sufficient in strength to fight a general engagement with any force which, in the opinion of the Government, it is reasonable to suppose the Japanese could afford to detach from the Pacific".

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<sup>2</sup> Churchill, Vol V, pp. 81-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Commonwealth Debates*, Vol 176, p. 572.

Meanwhile the Eastern Fleet, as then constituted, after an absence since April 1942, returned from its East African base to Colombo. Early in September a combined Royal Navy and Royal Air Force war room was opened at the naval base at Kilindini, whence the staff of the Commander-in-Chief sailed on 8th September for Colombo, where Admiral Somerville himself arrived on 21st September in the cruiser *Hawkins*. There was some small reinforcement of the fleet, which had been sadly depleted by the demands of other stations. For example in August, of the six Australian destroyers attached to the fleet, only *Nepal* was available for escort duty at a time when the Indian Ocean had the heaviest shipping losses of any theatre—eight ships of 54,035 tons, representing nearly half the tonnage lost in all areas. Of the other five Australian ships, *Napier* was refitting in South Africa, *Nizam* was on passage to Australia, and, as stated earlier, *Norman*, *Quickmatch*, and *Quiberon* were on loan to the South Atlantic Station. September, however, saw the Australian destroyers back in the Indian Ocean, with the exception of *Nizam* who did not rejoin until November. The Australian corvettes from the Mediterranean also returned to their Indian Ocean work, and other escort vessels were made available. Ship losses in the Indian Ocean in September declined to six ships of 39,471 tons—the Mediterranean and the Atlantic each showed heavier losses. But indications that an increase in U-boat activity in the Arabian Sea was to be expected necessitated the institution of regular convoys between Durban, Kilindini, and Aden; Aden-Bombay, and Colombo-Bombay; and the strengthening of convoy escorts in and out of the Persian Gulf.

In December 1942 the Japanese proposed that Penang or Sabang should be used as bases by the Germans for U-boat operations in the Indian Ocean, and at the request of the German Naval High Command started preparatory work on a base at Penang. But Doenitz refrained from operating thence while there were good opportunities in the Atlantic and elsewhere. By mid-1943 these were fading. In May the Germans were heavily defeated in the convoy battles in the North Atlantic, and in June Doenitz recorded:

I was faced with the most difficult decision of the whole war. I had to make up my mind whether to withdraw the boats from all areas and call off the U-boat war, or to let them continue operations in some suitably modified form, regardless of the enemy's superiority.<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately it was decided to continue the U-boat war, aided by accelerated research and production of new defensive measures and offensive weapons, and meanwhile to revert to the tactic of attacking "weak spots" in more distant theatres, and Doenitz sent boats to the Indian Ocean, where the Japanese had asked that the area of operations might be moved from South-East African waters to the Arabian Sea. At the time, mid-1943, there was, as previously mentioned, a group of seven U-boats operating in

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<sup>4</sup> Admiral Doenitz, *Memoirs*, p. 406.

South-East African waters. By August the U-boat Command had decided that the South African operations were uneconomic. In the eleven months since the initial attacks in October 1942, a total of 20 submarines in four groups<sup>5</sup> sank less than 100 ships for the loss of two U-boats, *U 179* off Capetown on 8th October 1942, and *U 197* about 300 miles south-west of Cape St Marie, Madagascar, on 20th August 1943. On the U-boat Command's time-tonnage basis this did not pay, and furthermore the end of the Middle East campaigns and the re-opening of the Mediterranean had diminished the strategical importance of the Cape route. The survivors of the final South African phase were withdrawn. Five of them returned to their Biscay bases. The sixth, *U 178*, in company with the Italian transport submarine *Torelli*, proceeded to Penang, and arrived there on 29th August, the first of the German U-boats to be based in the Far East, and the forerunner of what had been intended as a group of eleven boats to be based at Penang.

The eleven boats of the "Monsoon Group" left their home bases in June and July 1943, with instructions to operate in the Arabian Sea and refit at Penang. In the event six were lost, mainly by air attack, on the voyage out through the Atlantic, and only five—*U 168*, *U 183*, *U 188*, *U 532* and *U 533*—survived to enter the Indian Ocean, where they met a supply ship south of Mauritius on 11th September. An Italian submarine, *Ammiraglio Cagni*,<sup>6</sup> was to have joined them; but she heard the news of the Italian armistice on 8th September and went instead to Durban, where she was met and escorted into harbour by the corvette H.M.S. *Jasmine*<sup>7</sup> on 20th September.<sup>8</sup>

The arrival of the "Monsoon Group" in the Indian Ocean was noted by Admiralty Intelligence early in September, and the convoys were instituted. The first of these, on the Kilindini route, sailed from Durban on the 17th. Before this, Japanese submarines had also entered the Indian Ocean and were operating in the Colombo area. The first Indian Ocean attack of the month was made on the 7th by one of these, which unsuccessfully tried to torpedo the American *Lyman Stewart* (7,176 tons), 350 miles south-west of Colombo. Meanwhile there were other submarines operating in the Indian Ocean. On 27th July the Admiralty instructed the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, to release eight long-endurance submarines to the Eastern Fleet. *Trident*,<sup>9</sup> the first to go, left Aden on 4th August for Colombo. On her first patrol she fired eight torpedoes on 29th August

<sup>5</sup> "Polar Bear" (*U 68*, *U 156*, *U 172*, *U 504*), October-November 1942; U-cruisers (*U 177*, *U 178*, *U 179*, *U 181*), October 1942-January 1943; "Seehund" (*U 160*, *U 506*, *U 509*, *U 516*, *U 182*), February-April 1943; and U-cruisers (*U 177*, *U 178*, *U 181*, *U 195*, *U 196*, *U 197* and *U 198*) April-August 1943. There were, in addition, two "interlopers", the Italian *Leonardo da Vinci*, February-May 1943, and *U 180*, April-June 1943.

<sup>6</sup> *Ammiraglio Cagni*, Italian submarine (1940), 1,461 tons, two 3.9-in guns, fourteen 18-in torpedo tubes, 18 kts.

<sup>7</sup> HMS *Jasmine*, corvette (1941), 925 tons, one 4-in AA gun, 16 kts.

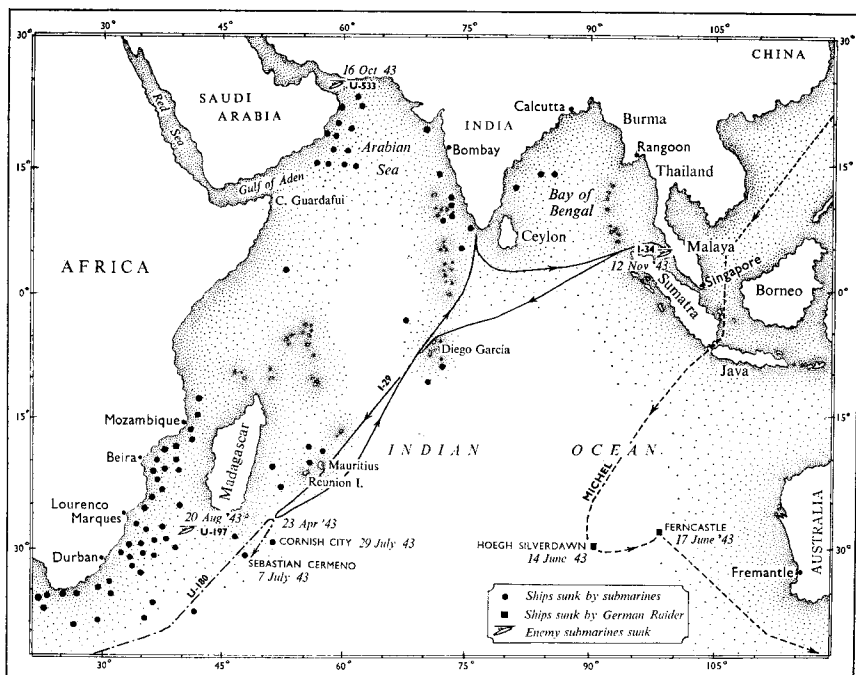
<sup>8</sup> Much of the above information is drawn from Admiral Doenitz, *Memoirs* and from L. C. F. Turner, H. R. Gordon-Cumming, J. E. Betzler, *War in the Southern Oceans* (1961), a volume in the war history of the Union of South Africa.

<sup>9</sup> HMS *Trident*, submarine (1939), 1,090 tons, one 4-in gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 15½ kts.



at the Japanese cruiser *Kashii* which was entering Sabang, and made one possible hit, though there is no record of this in Japanese archives.

In October the boats of the "Monsoon Group" were working their way northwards, and on the 5th, about 140 miles north of Cape Guardafui, one of them attacked convoy "AP47" and torpedoed the Norwegian tanker *Anna Knudsen* (9,057 tons). The ship did not sink and was helped to Aden by H.M.A.S. *Tamworth*. The submarines did not have it all their own way, and this month came a repercussion of an incident



Raiders and submarines, Indian Ocean 1943

more than twelve months earlier. As previously stated, on 29th September 1942, H.M.A.S. *Geraldton*, escorting a Persian Gulf convoy, attacked a strong submarine contact in the Gulf of Oman. As a result of this contact, 18 Bisley aircraft were sent in October 1942 as air reinforcements for convoy escort and were based on Sharjah with an advance base at Ras al Hadd. For a year they had long and arduous hours of flying without tangible result, but on 16th October Bisley aircraft of No. 244 Squadron attacked *U 533* which was surfaced in the Gulf of Oman just south of the Strait of Hormuz. The submarine crash-dived but was destroyed by the four 250-lb bombs dropped by the aircraft. The sole survivor, a torpedoed

rating, swam for 27 hours to land at Khor Fokkan, whence he was rescued by H.M.I.S. *Hiravati*.

During the month six ships totalling 25,833 tons were sunk in the Indian Ocean. Towards the end of the month U-boat activity slackened. The remaining boats of the "Monsoon Group" withdrew to Penang to refit, and in the rest of 1943 *U 178* was the only U-boat to operate in the Indian Ocean. As stated above, she reached Penang on 29th August to refit, but her requirements were beyond the capacity of the base to meet, and she was ordered to use up her torpedoes in the Indian Ocean and return to Europe. She left Penang on 27th November, and on 26th December sank the American ship *Jose Navarro* (7,244 tons) north of the Maldive Islands. Apart from the *Jose Navarro*, the sinkings in the Indian Ocean during November (four ships totalling 29,148 tons) and December (four ships totalling 23,929 tons) were by Japanese submarines. Between September and December, seven of these operated in the Indian Ocean, *I 162*, *I 165* and *I 166* in the Bay of Bengal; *I 10*, *I 27* and *I 29* in the Arabian Sea; and *I 37* in the Mozambique Channel. In November the British submarines allocated to the Eastern Fleet chalked up another success. On the 11th of the month *I 34*, a new boat built specially for blockade running, left Singapore. She was sunk on 13th November by H.M.S. *Taurus*<sup>1</sup> off Penang.

The easing of the submarine threat enabled an easing also of the convoy restrictions which, as the Admiralty informed Admiral Somerville on 7th December, entailed a monthly loss of about 1,800 ship days in insuring against "relatively modest and local threats". They considered a more elastic system should be instituted, with convoys only on routes actually or potentially threatened, and with escorts thus released operating as hunting groups. Somerville thereupon discontinued convoys from 12th December, with the exception of Bombay-Colombo and Colombo-Calcutta sailings. As an indication of the magnitude of traffic in the Indian Ocean as reflected on the Persian Gulf routes, "Snopgee" recorded that tonnages cleared in 1943 from Basra, Abadan, Khorramshahr and Bandar Shapur totalled 2,611,069 tons, of which 1,002,739 tons were British and U.S. military cargoes, and 1,608,330 tons were Aid to Russia cargoes. With the sailing of convoy "PB66" on 5th December, a total of more than 10,000,000 tons of shipping had been sailed in convoy from Hormuz since Persian Gulf convoys were introduced on 9th September 1942. Some of these convoys were of considerable size. For example on 17th October H.M.A.S. *Burnie* and her Australian-built colleague H.M.I.S. *Bengal* reached Bombay from the Persian Gulf escorting "PB59" which consisted of 15 ships totalling 111,815 tons; on 5th November H.M.A. Ships *Norman* and *Nepal* sailed from Bombay as part escort of a combined operations convoy of 16 ships totalling 145,872 tons; and on 26th November *Geraldton* and *Bengal* reached Bombay escorting "PG64" of 27 ships totalling 184,657

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<sup>1</sup> HMS *Taurus*, submarine (1942), 1,090 tons, one 4-in gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 15½ kts.

tons gross. These were but small sections of the Indian Ocean routes. In ensuring their protection, and in the arduous work that entailed, the Australian destroyers of the 7th Flotilla, and the Australian corvettes allotted to the Eastern Fleet, did a valuable job.

### VIII

There were, at this period, changes in the over-all constitution of the British naval forces. On 18th October the title of "Force H" lapsed. The best known of the many separate naval forces constituted for service in the war, it came into existence in June 1940 after the collapse of France, based on Gibraltar with the primary role of shadowing the Italian Fleet and acting offensively against Italy. From its constitution until his appointment to command the Eastern Fleet, Admiral Somerville had commanded "Force H", and it had been well known to Australian ships and seamen in the Mediterranean. With the surrender of Italy there was no longer any need for "Force H", nor for a battle squadron in the Mediterranean, and on 8th November the Admiralty directed that the battle squadron which was to be formed in the Eastern Fleet was to be known as the First Battle Squadron. For many years the First Battle Squadron had been stationed in the Mediterranean, and this Admiralty direction symbolised the transfer of British naval power to the Far East. Before the end of the year units of the First Battle Squadron were on their way to the Indian Ocean: *Renown*, *Queen Elizabeth*, *Valiant*, and four destroyers left Scapa Flow on 30th December and were joined by the aircraft carriers *Illustrious* and *Unicorn*,<sup>2</sup> and three destroyers, from the Clyde. After an uneventful passage via the Mediterranean, the ships reached Colombo on 30th January 1944.

Admiral Mountbatten assumed the duties of Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia, on 16th November 1943 and set up his headquarters in New Delhi. The island of Ceylon came within the orbit of his command from that date, and the Commander-in-Chief, Ceylon, Admiral Layton, came under Mountbatten's orders and was responsible to him for the island's defence and security and for such offensive preparations as the Supreme Commander required. But Layton retained overriding powers over the Civil Government of Ceylon. Mountbatten's intentions were to move his main headquarters to Kandy, Ceylon, after the middle of March 1944, and retain a rear headquarters in New Delhi. Meanwhile Admiral Somerville, to maintain contact as Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, had two headquarters, one at Colombo and one at New Delhi. His deputy C-in-C, Vice-Admiral Danckwerts, was at Colombo, dealing with the Fleet, shipping communications and safety, and station matters outside India. At New Delhi, Rear-Admiral Miles,<sup>3</sup> Deputy Naval Commander, South-East

<sup>2</sup> *Unicorn*, British aircraft carrier (1941), 14,750 tons, eight 4-in guns, 35 aircraft, 22 kts. *Unicorn* had been designed as an aircraft repair ship, but as she had a flight deck and could operate aircraft she was also classed alternatively as a light fleet carrier.

<sup>3</sup> Admiral Sir Geoffrey Miles, KCB, KCSI; RN. Comd HMS *Nelson* 1939-41; Head of Mil Mission in Moscow 1941-43; Dep Naval Cdr SEA Command 1943-44; Flag Offr Comdg Western Mediterranean 1944-45; C-in-C Royal Indian Navy 1946-47. B. 2 May 1890.

Asia Command, dealt with amphibious operations, the naval Assault Command, G.H.Q. India, and the Indian Government.

In the west some adjustments were made to the boundaries of the East Indies Station. On 6th November its boundary with the South Atlantic Station was moved northwards and eastwards, so that the south-west part of Madagascar came into the South Atlantic command. In the north-west, on 28th December, the boundary of the station was fixed along the parallel of 15 degrees north in the Red Sea. This brought Aden back into the command, which since October 1941 had been included in the Mediterranean command. The Commodore-in-Charge there now became responsible to the C.-in-C. Eastern Fleet for routine administration of his area south of 15 degrees north and operation of the local naval defence force at Aden, and for the protection and operational control of convoys and shipping in the Gulf of Aden, along the southern coast of Arabia, and in the Gulf of Oman, and "Snopgee's" responsibility for the ordering and routing of convoys in the Gulf portion ceased.

Little time was lost by Mountbatten in planning for the amphibious operations his directive envisaged in 1944, and the proposed first of these became a contentious bone at the Cairo conferences in December. The Americans were just as anxious as hitherto to support the Chinese war effort by a British offensive in the Indian Ocean and Burma. In accordance with his directive, Mountbatten planned an amphibious assault on the Andaman Islands (operation BUCCANEER) in March 1944. This was supported by the Americans, and Roosevelt gave the Chinese the promise of a considerable amphibious operation across the Bay of Bengal within the next few months. Admiral King suggested as a possible alternative to the amphibious assault on Burma that the British should invade the Malay peninsula north of Singapore and capture Bangkok. But any such amphibious assaults in the Indian Ocean were opposed by the British on the grounds that they would demand landing craft urgently required in European waters, for the assaults on Italy and for the forthcoming cross-Channel landings in France, and discussions became heated, with King and Brooke in the leading roles. Brooke, as spokesman for the British Chiefs of Staff, strongly opposed discussing South-East Asia before agreeing on plans for the assault on Europe and the over-all strategy of the war against Japan, and maintained that only when these had been settled would it be practicable to allocate assault shipping for BUCCANEER. The American General Joseph W. Stilwell ("Vinegar Joe") who was at the discussion recorded that: "Brooke got nasty and King got good and sore. King almost climbed over the table at Brooke. God he was mad. I wish he had socked him."<sup>4</sup> The question was still unresolved when the first Cairo Conference ended on 26th November. From that conference Mountbatten had returned to India with instructions to prepare revised plans for

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<sup>4</sup> *The Stilwell Papers* (1948), p. 245.

BUCCANEER, which Roosevelt considered could be carried out with 14,000 men. In Teheran the President told Stalin that

Anglo-American forces would co-operate with the Chinese and would be under the command of Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. Plans were also being discussed for an amphibious operation against the Japanese lines of communications from Bangkok. Considerable forces were to be employed, although every effort had been made to keep them down to the minimum required to achieve our essential objectives.<sup>5</sup>

Back in Cairo the Anglo-American discussions were resumed on 3rd December, with a deadlock over BUCCANEER. Mountbatten's revised plans for the operation called for 50,000 men—instead of the President's estimated 14,000—and 120 carrier-borne fighters, a force which would involve an even larger call on the Allies' inadequate amphibious assault resources than had originally been contemplated.<sup>6</sup> Churchill later said "this certainly broke the back of the Andamans expedition so far as this meeting was concerned", though the Americans—and in particular King—persisted that

political and military considerations and commitments make it essential that operation "Tarzan" [a land offensive in northern Burma] and an amphibious operation in conjunction therewith should take place. Apart from political considerations, there will be serious military repercussions if this is not done, not only in Burma and China, but also in the South-West Pacific.<sup>7</sup>

On the evening of 5th December, however, Roosevelt reluctantly saw the force of British arguments, overruled King, and sent Churchill the message: "Buccaneer is off."

## IX

There was one other naval incident of far-reaching importance before the curtain finally fell on the year 1943. In April of that year the British Admiralty, with Churchill's agreement, suspended the Arctic convoys to Russia until the return of the dark period. The daylight threat to the convoys, by aircraft and surface ships of the German fleet, including *Tirpitz*, and the heavy strain imposed on available destroyers by the Atlantic U-boat battle, made this decision inescapable. In September the Russians sought the resumption of the convoys, and after some negotiations between Churchill and Stalin, the convoys were resumed in November. The decision so to resume was helped by the fact that *Tirpitz* was put out of action for some months as the result of a successful attack by British midget submarines at the end of September. The second convoy in December was the object of attack by the German battleship *Scharnhorst*, which left Alten Fiord with five destroyers on the evening of Christmas Day. Two attempts by the Germans to reach the 19-ship convoy were foiled by its escort of 14 destroyers and covering force of three cruisers, *Belfast*<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Churchill, Vol V, p. 307.

<sup>6</sup> J. Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, Vol V (1956), in the Military series of the British official *History of the Second World War*, pp. 184-7.

<sup>7</sup> Ehrman, p. 190.

<sup>8</sup> *Belfast*, British cruiser (1939), 10,000 tons, nine 6-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 32½ kts.

(Flag), *Sheffield* and *Norfolk*, under the command of Vice-Admiral Burnett,<sup>9</sup> in running actions fought in the early forenoon and early afternoon of 26th December in a full south-westerly gale and high seas. Meanwhile, to the south-west and coming up as fast as possible, was the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, in the battleship *Duke of York*, with cruiser *Jamaica* and four destroyers. *Scharnhorst* quickly broke off the second action with Burnett's force and retired to the southward shadowed by Burnett, who kept the approaching Commander-in-Chief informed of the enemy's position. At 4.40 p.m., in the early Arctic darkness, Fraser and Burnett established radar contact. Burnett illuminated the enemy with starshell, and eight minutes later *Duke of York* and *Jamaica* engaged *Scharnhorst* at 12,000 yards. In a two-hour high-speed chase to the eastward *Scharnhorst* suffered 14-inch shell hits from *Duke of York* which reduced her speed, which was further diminished by torpedo hits resulting from an attack by four destroyers at about 6.50 p.m. During the next hour she was repeatedly hit by shells from *Duke of York*, *Jamaica*, and *Belfast*, and about 7.45 p.m. she sank after being torpedoed by the two cruisers and destroyers, taking with her the German group commander, Rear-Admiral Bey, and all her company except 36 ratings rescued by the victors.

The loss of *Scharnhorst* left Germany with *Tirpitz* as her only operational battleship. The rest of the major warships of the German Navy—two pocket battleships, seven cruisers, and two old battleships—were used as training ships in the Baltic. Though *Tirpitz* remained in the Baltic as a hampering threat to tie up British forces,<sup>1</sup> the sinking of *Scharnhorst* removed the worst immediate threat to the Arctic convoys, and gave new freedom to the Home Fleet. "So the year 1943 closed with the Navy in great heart," said the First Sea Lord in retrospect. "The U-boat menace appeared to be held, and the enemy's surface forces had been severely handled."<sup>2</sup> He was writing more specifically of the Atlantic theatre, but what he said was not inappropriate to the Indian and Pacific Oceans also.

<sup>9</sup> Admiral Sir Robert Burnett, KCB, KBE, DSO; RN, Rear-Adm Comdg Home Fleet Destroyer Flotillas 1942; 10 Cruiser Sqn 1943; C-in-C South Atlantic 1944-46. B. 22 Jul 1887. Died 2 Jul 1959.

<sup>1</sup> "The Commander-in-Chief, Navy, reports on the plan for the *Tirpitz*. The ship is to be repaired and to remain stationed in northern Norway. This course will be followed even if further damage is sustained. Regardless of how much work and manpower may be involved, the repairs must be made. After all, the presence of the *Tirpitz* does tie up enemy forces. The ship will hardly have any further opportunity for action, unless later political developments, such as a falling out between England and Russia, were to bring this about. . . ." *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 12 and 13 April 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Cunningham, p. 593.

## CHAPTER 13

### PACIFIC DRIVE—INDIAN OCEAN INTERLUDE

IN the early part of 1944 a number of questions exercised the minds of the Allied statesmen, Chiefs of Staff, and area commanders. The question how the war would end was being answered by events and by Allied progress in all theatres. By now its direction and probable period were becoming clearer. In both the European and the Pacific theatres its direction was, with mounting force, towards the final subjugation of the enemies' home territories. In the west the Axis "Fortress Europe" was being assailed in the south through Italy, and plans were in the making for the main cross-Channel attack on northern France about the middle of the year, and for another subsidiary attack on southern Europe later on. (During the first half of the year the "official" Admiralty date for the defeat of Germany was October 1944.) In the Pacific the north-westerly drive of MacArthur and the westerly drive of Nimitz in their twin assaults on the Japanese eastern perimeter were making good progress. That perimeter's boundary had already been pushed well westward and north-westward from its 1942 limit. There was, however, no close estimate of the date of Japan's defeat, and the possibility of a protracted struggle was not dismissed.

Meanwhile the British Navy's part in this, and the rival claims of an Indian Ocean strategy and a Pacific Ocean strategy engaged the consideration of both the British and the Americans—and was also the cause of dissension between Churchill and his Ministerial colleagues, and the British Chiefs of Staff. Broadly, the Americans were in favour of the British pursuing an offensive in the Indian Ocean, as was Churchill. The British Chiefs of Staff, on the other hand, wished a part to be found for the Royal Navy in the offensive in the Pacific after Germany's defeat. And though Churchill and the Americans were in agreement regarding British activity against the western Japanese perimeter, they differed regarding the type of activity; and the insistence of the Americans on a land campaign in Burma persisted against Churchill's wish for amphibious operations. Churchill later stated:

We of course wanted to recapture Burma, but we did not want to have to do it by land advances from slender communications and across the most forbidding fighting country imaginable. The south of Burma, with its port of Rangoon, was far more valuable than the north. But all of it was remote from Japan, and for our forces to become side-tracked and entangled there would deny us our rightful share in a Far Eastern victory. I wished, on the contrary, to contain the Japanese in Burma, and break into or through the great arc of islands forming the outer fringe of the Dutch East Indies. Our whole British-Indian Imperial front would thus advance across the Bay of Bengal into close contact with the enemy, by using amphibious power at every stage.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, Vol V, pp. 494-5.

Churchill then adhered to his CULVERIN plan, and disapproved of the British Chiefs of Staff proposal to use naval forces, and any others that could be spared, to act with the left flank of the United States forces in the South-West Pacific, based on Australia. Cooperation on these lines was discussed in the late months of 1943 between the British and American planners in Washington, and an outline scheme was produced, together with some calculations as to the strength of the "Fleet Train" that would be needed.<sup>2</sup> The then First Sea Lord, Admiral Cunningham, was whole-heartedly in favour of sending the fleet to join with the American fleet in active operations, and "the Chiefs of Staff also agreed, for it seemed about the only force that could be spared". But, writing of this later, Admiral Cunningham recorded:

For some reason which I never really understood the Prime Minister did not at first agree. He seemed to take the view that the fleet would be better employed in assisting in the recapture of our own possessions, Malaya and Singapore, or it may be he was rather daunted, if daunted he ever was, by the huge demands made upon shipping by the provision of the fleet train. He may also have been influenced by the undoubted feeling that prevailed in naval circles in the United States, from Admiral King downwards, that they wanted no British fleet in the Pacific. . . . All this uncertainty led us to consider the middle course of Australian and Empire troops, and the necessary Air, with the British Fleet, going for Amboina in the Moluccas from northern Australia late in 1944 or early the next year. From there they would operate against the Dutch East Indies and Borneo.<sup>3</sup>

While all these divergent views continued to exercise some effect over some months, the Admiralty went steadily on with their preparations to send a fleet to the Pacific. In the meantime, on 2nd January 1944, they promulgated a revised composition of the Eastern Fleet comprising 146 vessels for its reinforcement up to the end of April. The list included 3 capital ships, 2 fleet carriers, 14 cruisers, 24 fleet destroyers, and sloops, frigates, corvettes, minesweepers, submarines, and ancillary vessels. On 12th January Admiral Somerville sought from the Admiralty clarification of the policy to be followed in his area. His own appreciation was that it was intended to hold the Japanese in the Indian Ocean and strike in the Pacific. On 15th January the Admiralty confirmed this view, and assured Somerville that savings in manpower which he envisaged as possible were the Indian Ocean war to be a holding war would be a welcome contribution in view of the existing shortage.

On the 25th of the month Admiral King took a hand and indicated to the Admiralty the American naval desire that the British should confine their naval activities against the Japanese to the Indian Ocean. He suggested that if their naval forces there were aggressively employed against Japanese airfields, port installations, shipping concentrations and oil targets

<sup>2</sup> These calculations caused some concern to the British because the size of the fleet train proved —after discussions with the Americans by an Admiralty team sent out to the Pacific to investigate requirements—to be greatly in excess of what the British had imagined would be necessary. One of the British delegation, Commodore E. M. Evans Lombe, told the Australian Naval Staff in Melbourne on his return from Pearl Harbour that the delegation members had had to recast their thinking on this matter.

<sup>3</sup> *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 598.



the threat would tie down a considerable number of Japanese aircraft and contribute more to the war in the Pacific than would British intervention in that ocean. He proposed that the fleet the British planned to send to the Pacific should, initially at any rate, be thus employed in the Indian Ocean. On 29th January the Admiralty expressed the view that attacks against targets such as those King suggested were unprofitable unless there was some definite objective to be achieved, and were a misuse of fleet carriers and naval aircraft.

While these exchanges took place between the Admiralty and King, Churchill made it clear to the Chiefs of Staff Committee that he stood firm for an Indian Ocean strategy, and that CULVERIN was the "only effectual operation" providing an outlet "for the very large air and military forces we have standing in India and around the Bay of Bengal". In the middle of February his views received support from Mountbatten, a mission from whom, headed by his American Deputy Chief of Staff, General Wedemeyer, visited London and Washington to present the East Asian Supreme Commander's strategy. This opposed the American project for a land campaign, and proposed penetration of the Japanese perimeter of Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies, and a north-eastern advance along the Asiatic coast—with CULVERIN as the first step. But though this commended itself to Churchill and the Foreign Office "who thought that the British role in the Far East should not be a mere minor contribution to the Americans",<sup>4</sup> it failed to secure an appreciative audience at Washington.

At this stage a series of important Allied moves in the Pacific produced results which put a stop for the time being to CULVERIN or other amphibious essays in the Indian Ocean, where the position of the Eastern Fleet vis-à-vis the Japanese Fleet became somewhat similar to that it had occupied almost two years earlier—one of inferior strength consequent on a concentration of major enemy units at Singapore. This concentration, in the last week in February, evoked the threat of a Japanese descent in force into the Bay of Bengal, and the resultant tendency on Somerville's part to withdraw the Eastern Fleet to the west of the Maldivian Islands. It soon became apparent, however, that the Japanese move was defensive rather than aggressive. It arose from the devastating American air attack on Truk on 17th-18th February, and the American seizure of control of the Marshall Islands with the capture—by marines supported by powerful naval forces under Vice-Admiral Spruance—of Kwajalein (31st January-7th February) and Eniwetok (17th-22nd February). The smashing air attack on Truk, and a similar one a week later on Saipan in the Marianas, were to forestall naval and air attacks from them on the American forces at Eniwetok. Before February was over Allied forces in the South-West Pacific assaulted the Admiralty Islands. By 3rd April, with them under control, they had in their possession as a substitute for Rabaul "a better

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<sup>4</sup> Churchill, Vol V, p. 506.

base behind the Bismarcks Barrier, farther advanced along the New Guinea-Mindanao axis, more useful to the Allies and dangerous to the enemy".<sup>5</sup>

The Allied capture or nullification of Japanese keypoints in the western Pacific in February and March 1944 marked the turning point of the New Guinea campaign, and forced on the Japanese a realignment of their eastern perimeter and a regrouping of their forces within it.

## II

When it was decided to bypass Rabaul, an alternative advanced base was sought by MacArthur, and as early as mid-1943 the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested the Admiralty Islands as the answer. It was a good one. Situated at the apex of an equilateral triangle whose other two angles are the Huon Peninsula, 240 miles due south, and Kavieng, the north-western point of New Ireland, 240 miles due east, the Admiralties were well situated as a stopper to the Bismarck Archipelago bottle, and their possession by a power capable of controlling their communications conferred upon it command of the archipelago and its waters, including Pacific Ocean communications with eastern New Guinea. The islands possessed, in Seadler Harbour, a magnificent fleet anchorage and potentialities for development into a major naval base; and potentialities also existed for the development of airfields. Manus Island dominates the Admiralty group, being much larger than any of the others, which lie south of it in a rough semi-circle from east through south to west. About 50 miles long from west to east and 17 miles in greatest breadth, Manus has at its eastern end its nearest neighbour in the group, the crescent-shaped island of Los Negros which, separated from Manus by the narrow Poaei Passage, forms the eastern half of Seadler Harbour whose northern shores, continuing westward, are formed by a barrier reef and the easternmost of its eleven small islands—Koruniat, Ndrilo, Hauwei, Pityilu, etc—which fringe the northern coast of Manus. The harbour thus formed is some 15 miles long and 4 wide, with depths varying from 11 to 24 fathoms.

Manus was discovered by the Dutch navigator Schouten in 1616. In September 1767 it was visited by Captain Philip Carteret in the sloop *Swallow*, and the name "Admiralty Islands" was given by him to the group. German sovereignty over the group was proclaimed in 1884, and continued until 1914, when the Royal Australian Navy hoisted the British flag there. The Admiralties were mandated to Australia in 1920, and were occupied by the Japanese in their triumphant essay into the South-West Pacific in 1942. Before the Japanese occupation the European population of the Admiralties, including the wives and families of planters, was about 100, including four government officers, 15 missionaries and 25 planters. There were a Japanese (who owned the Momote plantation and aerodrome on Los Negros Island), two Chinese and two Filipinos. The native population of the group totalled about 13,000, of whom 10,000 lived on Manus.

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<sup>5</sup> Morison, Vol VI, p. 448.

The Admiralty Islands had one drawback as an operational base. They lie just below the Equator on the second meridian, and the climate is unattractive to Europeans, with high temperatures, rainfall, and humidity. Vice-Admiral Sir Bernard Rawlings, when he arrived there in 1945 as Second-in-Command of the British Pacific Fleet, described it as the most objectionable that he had ever known, and in his report to the Admiralty he expressed bewilderment regarding "under what circumstances and by whose whimsical conception these islands should have been named in honour of Their Lordships".<sup>6</sup>

On 12th October 1943 Halsey signalled to King and Nimitz reporting a conference with MacArthur and tentative plans for (a) Soupac assault on Kavieng supported by carriers and heavy fleet units; (b) assault on Manus to be mounted in New Guinea; (c) bypassing of Rabaul, and preparations for the establishment of a Bismarck fleet base—site to be determined after occupation. In reply to a note in the signal that MacArthur desired assurance of the fleet's protection during his subsequent movement along the New Guinea coast "beginning about 1st May", Nimitz said on 20th October:

The Pacific Fleet has been and will continue to be disposed to prevent major enemy naval interference with planned operations in the South-Southwest as well as the Central and North Pacific areas. . . . Full consideration will be given to support of operations along New Guinea coast. Developments meantime, operations in other areas, and particularly the location of major part of Japanese naval strength must necessarily influence any decision reached.

The original target date for the occupation of the Admiralty Islands and the assault on Kavieng was 1st January 1944. But the west New Britain operations, and the involvement of the Pacific Fleet in Micronesia imposed delays. On 30th January, Nimitz, in a message to King, submitted recommendations which were approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They were that a two-day carrier-borne air attack should be made on Truk about 26th March. These naval forces should then participate in the operations for the seizure or control of the Kavieng area and Manus Island about 1st April. When they could be spared from these operations, the carriers and attached forces should proceed to South Pacific bases to prepare for the operations against Eniwetok. The Kavieng operation would be commanded by Halsey with the Third Fleet, and that at the Admiralty Islands by MacArthur with the Seventh Fleet.

In the meantime Halsey, eager to "keep the offensive rolling" during the waiting period for the Bismarcks operation, carried out the occupation of the Green Islands which, 40 miles north of Buka and 120 miles east of Rabaul, provided the Allies with an aerodrome which for the first time brought Kavieng within range of Airsols (Air Command, Solomons) fighters and light bombers. Rear-Admiral Wilkinson's III Amphibious Force formed the attack group, with him in command of the operation. The landing force was composed of the 3rd New Zealand Division under

<sup>6</sup> Roskill, Vol III, Part II, pp. 332-3.



(Argus, Melbourne)

*Warramunga* approaching *Australia* during operations, March 1944.



(Australian War Memorial)

*ML424* moving out at dusk on all night patrol from Madang, 21st April 1944.



(U.S. Navy)

A phase of the Hollandia landing, 22nd April 1944.



(Argus, Melbourne)

H.M.A.S. *Shropshire* and ships of Task Force 74 manoeuvring at sea during an air attack, May 1944.

Major-General Barrowclough,<sup>7</sup> with Seabees, etc. After a preliminary reconnaissance in force on the night 30th-31st January, the main landing was made just after dawn on 15th February 1944, on which day 5,800 men were landed. By 20th February all of the Japanese garrison of 102 had been killed. By 4th March—on which day command of the Green Islands passed from Admiral Wilkinson to General Barrowclough—an emergency landing was made on the new fighter strip, and on 16th March Airsols dive bombers and torpedo bombers based on Nissan Island made their first air attack on Kavieng.

Halsey told MacArthur on 1st January of the plan to seize the Green Islands not later than 15th February, and at the same time told him that he had directed preparation of a plan for the seizure and occupation of Emirau Island in lieu of Kavieng. MacArthur did not approve this substitution, considering Emirau (135 miles north-west of Kavieng) unsound “because it was too deep a penetration and could be disastrous, whereas Kavieng was more effective and less dangerous”. Nimitz, however, was convinced that the Airsols campaign would make Kavieng’s occupation unnecessary, and in the event Emirau was substituted for it.

While these preliminaries were proceeding with regard to the Bismarcks, preparations by the Fifth Fleet were going forward for operation FLINTLOCK, the assault on the Marshall Islands. The date for that assault was originally 1st January, but this was postponed to the 31st because of need for more time for preparation. Originally it was planned, because of the need to secure an atoll with a completed bomber strip, to launch the attack on one of the eastern Marshalls—Maloelap or Wotje, both strongly defended. It was then thought that Kwajalein atoll—the centre of the Marshalls “web”, and hub of the Japanese outer defence perimeter—had no airfield big enough for bombers. But on 4th December one of the American carrier aircraft taking part in an air strike took a photograph which disclosed a bomber strip, about 70 per cent completed, on the boomerang-shaped island of Kwajalein. It was immediately decided to bypass Maloelap and Wotje—whose air power could be neutralised by fast carrier forces and land-based aircraft from the Gilberts—and capture Kwajalein. It was a decision that advanced the war by some months.

As at the Gilberts, Vice-Admiral Spruance, Fifth Fleet, had overall command. Rear-Admiral Turner, V Amphibious Force, was in tactical command until the ground forces were able to take over. The Joint Expeditionary Force comprised 297 ships, exclusive of fast carrier task groups and submarines engaged in the operation. Assault troops numbered about 54,000 Marines and soldiers. The attack was delivered by three forces—the Northern Attack Force to take Roi and Namur Islands in Kwajalein atoll; the Southern Attack Force for Kwajalein Island; and a third amphibious unit, part of which was a reserve for Kwajalein,

<sup>7</sup> Maj-Gen Rt Hon Sir Harold Barrowclough, KCMG, CB, DSO, MC, ED. Comd 6 NZ Bde 1940-42; GOC 1 NZ Div 1942, 2 NZEF in Pacific and 3 NZ Div 1942-44. Chief Justice of New Zealand since 1953. Barrister and solicitor; of Auckland, NZ; b. Masterton, NZ, 23 Jun 1894.

and the other part of which was to occupy, and quickly develop as an advanced base, the unoccupied atoll ("a pearl of an atoll", Mrs Robert Louis Stevenson called it)<sup>8</sup> of Majuro, lying in the centre of the Jaluit-Maloelap-Mili triangle on the eastern extreme of the Marshalls group. The three assault groups struck on 31st January. By 9.50 a.m. Majuro was secured without the loss of a man, and the American flag was raised "on the first Japanese territory—Japanese before the war—to fall into American hands". Soon its airstrips and lagoon made it "almost a second home to the fast carrier forces between strikes", and one of the busiest of naval advanced bases.

It took a week to subjugate Kwajalein atoll in an operation which entailed landings on some 30 different islets, fights on ten of them and fierce, prolonged battles on four, and which concluded on 7th February. The navy suffered "a mere handful of casualties". The marines and soldiers lost 372 killed and 1,582 wounded out of 41,446 troops committed. The Japanese killed numbered 7,870, and prisoners taken were 265, of whom 165 were Koreans.

Now came a development which affected the impending operations in the Bismarcks. Before the assault on Kwajalein it had been assumed that there would be a marking time of a month or so before the Eniwetok operation while Fifth Fleet gave carrier and gunfire support in the Bismarcks. But Spruance was eager to push ahead with the Eniwetok operation immediately after Kwajalein. His reserve force of 8,000 troops had not been committed and were now ready on hand for Eniwetok, and it was decided to push straight ahead. Eniwetok's geographical position—the name means "Land between East and West"—made it an ideal stepping stone on the westward track to the Marianas and Philippines, and made it also a target for Japanese air strikes from Truk, 669 miles to the south-west, and Saipan, W.N.W. 1,017 miles. The need to hit them first led to the advancement of the air attacks planned to be made on Truk about 26th March. Instead, they were made on 17th-18th February, and were followed a week later by carrier raids on Saipan. Meanwhile the nearer enemy base of Ponape, in the Caroline Islands east of Truk, and Eniwetok itself, were heavily attacked by aircraft from Tarawa and from carriers, and the day after the Truk assault—which finished that atoll's phase of usefulness as a fleet anchorage and advanced naval base for the Japanese—the initial landings were made on islands in the north of Eniwetok atoll, free from enemy opposition. That opposition developed next day when the island of Engebi was assaulted, but its capture was effected by late afternoon that day, with the loss of 85 marines killed and 166 wounded—and about 1,000 Japanese defenders dead. For the two main southern islands in the atoll, Parry and Eniwetok, fighting was hard and costly. Eniwetok was in American hands by 4.30 p.m. on 21st February, and Parry Island by 7.30 p.m. next day. Their capture took

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<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol VII, which was drawn upon for this section.

110 American lives (355 wounded) and spelled the death of 1,731 Japanese. The rest of the Marshalls story was that of mopping up minor atolls and developing the bases, while subjecting the dwindling garrisons of the bypassed islands of Mili, Jaluit, Wotje and Maloelap to air raids which they suffered until their final surrender with that of the Empire in 1945. "Thus," said the American naval historian, "within three months the 'impregnable' Marshall Archipelago had become an American possession—always excepting stubbornly held Wotje, Maloelap, Mili and Jaluit."<sup>9</sup> Within the same three months the Admiralty Islands also fell into Allied hands.

### III

For the first two months of 1944 Task Force 74 hardly functioned as a group. Much of the period was taken up with the cruisers giving leave or refitting in Sydney, and the destroyers being detached for other duties. The cruisers constituting the Task Force were *Australia* (Flag), *Shropshire*, and U.S. Ships *Phoenix*, *Nashville* and *Boise*. The American ships constituted Crudiv 15, with Rear-Admiral Russell S. Berkey, flying his flag in *Phoenix*, as Comcrdiv 15 and Second-in-Command Task Force 74. The eight destroyers which had been assigned to the task force for the capture of Cape Gloucester were transferred to Admiral Barbey's Task Force 76 on completion of the assault landing and withdrawal of the cruisers. In the early days of January the two Australian cruisers were based at Milne Bay, and the three of Crudiv 15 off Buna and its vicinity. On 5th January Admiral Crutchley conferred with Admiral Kinkaid at Milne Bay, and received Kinkaid's plans for the employment of the task force. In outline they were that the task force destroyers would provide escort for the reinforcement and supply of Allied positions at Gloucester and Saidor, thus relieving Task Force 76 destroyers for a period of liberty and rest in Sydney; that on the return of Task Force 76 destroyers, those of Task Force 74 would have their liberty turn in Sydney—and *Arunta* and *Warramunga* were each to have three weeks' refit in Sydney; that the task force cruisers would take it in turn to have a period of rest and liberty in Sydney, while providing that a force of three cruisers was always available in New Guinea; and that *Australia* should be granted eight weeks availability for refit. In accordance with this program, *Warramunga* (released by CTF.74), left Milne Bay on 8th January and reached Sydney on the 11th for three weeks' overhaul. Next day *Australia* (Flag of Admiral Crutchley) and *Nashville* sailed from Milne Bay for Sydney, leaving *Phoenix*, *Boise* and *Shropshire* in New Guinea under the tactical command of Admiral Berkey in Crutchley's absence. During most of that period the Crudiv 15 ships and *Shropshire* exercised in the area Milne Bay-Buna, but in the early hours of 26th January the two American cruisers, with destroyers *Ammen*, *Mullany* and *Bush* (released for the occasion from

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<sup>9</sup> Morison, Vol VII, p. 314.



Task Force 76) bombarded Madang and Alexishafen, firing a total of 901 6-inch and 2,651 5-inch shells. Next day *Shropshire* sailed from Milne Bay and reached Sydney on the 30th. Her place with *Crudiv 15* was taken by *Nashville*, which reached Milne Bay on 29th January after her rest period in Sydney.

At 8 a.m. on 7th February in Sydney, Crutchley's flag was hauled down in *Australia* and hoisted in *Shropshire*. The new flagship sailed from Sydney two days later, having as passengers the First Naval Member, Admiral Royle; his secretary, Captain J. B. Foley; and Mr Essington Lewis,<sup>1</sup> Director-General of Munitions, who were visiting the forward areas. *Shropshire* reached Milne Bay on 13th February, and Berkey turned over tactical command to Crutchley and left by air for Sydney to join *Phoenix*, which had sailed there from Milne Bay on the 11th. Meanwhile *Warramunga*, her overhaul completed, had arrived back in Milne Bay on 7th February, and *Arunta* had gone south for her turn. On 14th February, Admiral Royle and his party embarked in *Warramunga* and went in her to Buna, Langemak and Lae, whence they continued their tour by air. The period of rest and refits was closing and the Task Force building up again. On 22nd February three American destroyers joined; and a fourth, and *Warramunga*, next day. The Task Force then comprised three cruisers—*Shropshire*, *Boise*, *Nashville*, and five destroyers—*Warramunga*, *Daly*, *Hutchins*, *Bache* and *Ammen*, operational in New Guinea; and cruisers *Australia* and *Phoenix*, and destroyer *Arunta* in Sydney. *Phoenix*, wearing Admiral Berkey's flag, left Sydney with destroyers *Mullany* and *Beale*<sup>2</sup> on 24th February. Next day Berkey reported to Commander Seventh Fleet, Admiral Kinkaid, in Brisbane, and was told of a planned reconnaissance in force of the Admiralty Islands, and that *Phoenix* would be required in New Guinea forthwith. She arrived at Milne Bay on the 27th.

Subsequent to the speed-up of the Marshalls operations the date for the Admiralty Islands assault was still, for a while, as earlier decided, 1st April; and Kavieng was still included in the South-West Pacific calculations. That Command's Operations Instruction No. 44 of 13th February stated in the preamble that "SWP and SOP forces covered by US Fleet will gain control of the Bismarcks and isolate Rabaul by simultaneous seizure of Manus and Kavieng. Target for D day, 1st April 1944." Nine days later these instructions were revoked by Operations Plan 2-44 of 22nd February which detailed responsibilities. Admiral Barbey's VII Amphibious Force was to transport elements of the Sixth American Army to the Admiralty Islands and support them in securing their possession; Admiral Wilkinson's III Amphibious Force was to seize Kavieng for an air and light naval base; Fifth Fleet, Airsols, and Fifth Army Air Force were to cover both operations, target date 1st April.

<sup>1</sup> Essington Lewis, CH, Chief Gen Mgr Broken Hill Pty Ltd 1938-50; Dir-Gen of Munitions 1940-45 and Dir-Gen of Aircraft Production 1942-45. Of Melbourne; b. Burra, SA, 13 Jan 1881. Died 2 Oct 1961.

<sup>2</sup> *Daly*, *Hutchins* and *Beale*, US destroyers (1942-43), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

Then there was a sudden speeding up. The Fifth Army Air Force had made several bomber strikes on the Admiralty Islands in late January, and on 6th and 13th February. On 22nd February a B-25 medium bomber on reconnaissance flew low over the islands for an hour and a half and saw no sign of enemy occupation. It was assumed from this that the Japanese had left, and MacArthur thereupon decided to carry out a reconnaissance in force. On the afternoon of 25th February he ordered units of the 1st American Cavalry Division (already chosen for the assault) to land on Los Negros on the 29th. Two days later, when it was too late to change the new plan, a report was received from an American reconnaissance party which had landed on Los Negros from a Catalina aircraft on the 27th, and whose inability to cross the island was explained in the phrase: "Could not get to river. Lousy with Japs." But by then the assault forces were on the move, and the only change made was to increase the fire power of the bombardment. Meanwhile, indicating how "out of the blue" was this sudden advance of operations in the Bismarcks, Nimitz, on 26th February, radioed to MacArthur:

Operations in the Marshalls and Carolines and Marianas have destroyed or expelled enemy fleet units at least temporarily from the Marshalls and Central Carolines. They have also reduced and dislocated his shore-based deployment and have occasioned considerable withdrawals from the Bismarcks to regarrison Truk. Accordingly I consider the task assigned by JCS dispatch 231515<sup>3</sup> partially accomplished and do not propose to strike Truk in March unless profitable targets appear. The units allocated to the 3rd and 7th Fleet for Manus-Kavieng plus two fast carrier groups for direct support are being sent south in time to meet rehearsals and target date 1 April.

Admiral Kinkaid first learned of MacArthur's decision to make the reconnaissance in force (to be exploited into an occupation if events favoured this) on the day *Phoenix* and Berkey reached Brisbane. That day, too, Barbey, VII Amphibious Force, received his directive that the operation be undertaken at the earliest practicable date "and not later than 29 February". The limited preparation time made it impracticable to use other than destroyers and destroyer-transport for the initial landing. Nine destroyers and three destroyer-transport were assembled at Cape Sudest and comprised the ships of the attack group (Task Group 76.1, Captain Jesse H. Carter's destroyers *Reid*, *Flusser*, *Mahan*, *Drayton*, *Smith*, *Bush*, *Welles*, *Stevenson* and *Stockton*,<sup>4</sup> and destroyer-transport *Humphreys*, *Brooks* and *Sands*<sup>5</sup>) with Barbey's deputy, Rear-Admiral William M. Fechteler, in command. His task was to "embark, transport, and land the

<sup>3</sup> Radio 231515Z, 23 Jan 1944 from JCS to Cincpoa: "Operations for the seizure of control of the Bismarcks Archipelago and for the advance along New Guinea will be conducted under the command of CinCSWPA as directed in 231510Z. You will provide cover for the Bismarcks operations by destroying or containing the Japanese fleet. These covering operations will remain under your direct command. You will furnish CinCSWPA additional assault shipping and naval support for operations against the Bismarcks as directed by the JCS. Target date for the Bismarcks is 1 April 1944."

<sup>4</sup> *Welles*, *Stevenson* and *Stockton*, US destroyers (1942-43), 1,630 tons, four 5-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

<sup>5</sup> *Humphreys*, *Brooks* and *Sands*, US destroyer-transport (1920), 1,190 tons, four 4-in guns, twelve 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

Landing Force on Beach White at the south end of Hyane Harbour” on 29th February. The landing force, of 1,026 troops, embarked at Sudest on the afternoon of the 27th. That afternoon, *Phoenix* reached Milne Bay. There MacArthur and Kinkaid—who had flown up from Brisbane—embarked in her, and at 4.45 p.m. she sailed as Berkey’s flagship of Task Group 74.2—*Phoenix*, *Nashville*, and destroyers *Daly*, *Hutchins*, *Beale* and *Bache*. It was the group’s mission to give fire support at the landing.

Task Group 74.2 arrived at Sudest in the early hours of Monday, 28th February, and after a conference between MacArthur and Service chiefs sailed ahead of Task Group 76.1—which it preceded by a distance of about 11 miles—to the objective, which was reached without incident soon after 7 a.m. on the 29th.

Hyane Harbour is on the eastern, the outer, side of Los Negros Island. It is landlocked, lying like a crab with its rounded back inland to the west, and the claws forming the north and south arms between which, in the east, lies the harbour entrance. The harbour is not deep, and is partly obstructed by coral, reefs of which fringe the coast. Just south of the harbour, on the coast, were the Momote plantation and aerodrome. There were Japanese guns on the northern and southern arms, and on the centre beach on the western side opposite the entrance. From seaward the north and south points, and the inner beach area, presented difficult targets calling for accurate spotting and fine adjustments in range.

In the original planning all gunfire support for the landing was to be given by the destroyers of the Attack Group, 76.1. The role of Task Group 74.2 was the provision of cover, but Kinkaid’s Operation Order to the group told Berkey to “be prepared to conduct bombardment if directed by Commander Seventh Fleet”. When the reconnaissance party report of large Japanese forces on Los Negros was received, Berkey was asked to supply gunfire support at the actual landing and to the area the party had examined—just south of Hyane Harbour—and to have his destroyers take over portion of the fire support area assigned to the Attack Group destroyers. This request was met “in part” by assigning one cruiser (*Phoenix*) and two destroyers as requested. The other cruiser and two destroyers were assigned targets to the north in the Lorengau-Seedler Harbour area.<sup>6</sup> Fechteler subsequently observed that “had the request for support been complied with in full rather than in part, the results would have been even better”.

*Nashville*, *Beale* and *Bache*, the ships for the northern bombardment, were released from Task Group 74.2 at 5.55 a.m. on the 29th and proceeded at 20 knots to their bombardment positions. The three ships commenced firing at 7.40 a.m. at targets at Lorengau. At the same time the southern ships opened fire on their targets in the Hyane Harbour area, towards which the first wave of landing boats was speeding from the ships of the Attack Group. They were met by machine-gun fire, while heavier

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<sup>6</sup> Report of Admiralty Islands Operation, 29 February 1944—Rear-Admiral W. M. Fechteler.

shore batteries opened fire on the destroyers. This was silenced and, under the close support of the destroyers and bombing and strafing by nine army aircraft, the first three waves of attackers had landed by 8.20 a.m. No opposition was encountered at the beach, and debarkation continued in the face of continued but diminishing enemy fire on the boats. The topography made naval fire support difficult, since from seaward the Japanese gun positions offered meagre targets. Fechteler could not get adequate knowledge of the location of the Americans on shore, nor could the ships' gunnery people learn the effect of their fire. It apparently silenced the enemy guns, but these resumed firing immediately the ships checked fire. The invaders had captured Momote aerodrome by 9.50 a.m. Soon afterwards heavy rain set in, and continued throughout the landing operations. Though this heightened the bombardment problem, it provided cover enabling landings to go on. By 12.50 p.m. the unloading was completed, and sporadic fire was coming from only one Japanese gun, that on the western side of the harbour opposite the entrance. MacArthur and Kinkaid went on shore from *Phoenix* at about 4 p.m. and stayed for an hour inspecting the perimeter established round the aerodrome. The commander of the Landing Force, Brigadier-General William C. Chase, assumed command on shore and was directed by MacArthur to hold on pending reinforcement. Task Group 74.2 left for Finschhafen as soon as MacArthur and Kinkaid returned to *Phoenix* at 5.19 p.m. A few minutes later the Attack Group also sailed, for Sudest, after detaching destroyers *Bush* and *Stockton* to remain to furnish fire support to the troops on shore.

Fechteler later recorded that

close supporting fire right up to the beach should be mandatory. In this case lack of proper type of supporting ships prevented this support. The situation was saved by the intensity of the preliminary bombardment, the determination of boats' crews, the inaccuracy of Japanese fire, and later on by heavy rain.<sup>7</sup>

That night and the succeeding night the troops ashore were heavily attacked by the Japanese garrison which, at some 2,000 strong in the immediate vicinity, outnumbered them by two to one. Chase had taken the precaution to shorten the perimeter by withdrawing to a line approximately 1,500 yards long which began at the beach opposite the harbour entrance, ran south along the eastern edge of the air strip for half its length, and then bent eastward to the sea, and the Americans held on. Chase later reported that the support from the sea by *Bush* and *Stockton* was his salvation.

Meanwhile reinforcements were coming forward. On 26th February *Warramunga* and *Ammen* were detached from Task Force 74 for temporary duty with VII Amphibious Force, and sailed from Milne Bay to Sudest. Here they were joined by the destroyer *Mullany* and minesweeper *Hamilton*,<sup>8</sup> and at 10 a.m. on 29th February the four ships, with *Warramunga* Senior Officer, sailed from Sudest to Cape Cretin to join Echelon

<sup>7</sup> Commander VII Amphibious Force. Report on Admiralty Islands Operations, 16 March 1944.

<sup>8</sup> *Hamilton*, US minesweeper (conv. 1942), 1,060 tons, three 3-in guns, 30 kts.

H2—carrying supplies, 1,000 combat troops and 1,300 construction troops, and comprising six L.S.T's each towing one loaded L.C.M.—for Los Negros. Echelon H2 arrived off Hyane Harbour at 9.30 a.m. on 2nd March, two hours after Dechaineux detached *Mullany* with *Hamilton* and another minesweeper, *Long*,<sup>9</sup> which had joined on the way, to sweep the entrance to Seeadler Harbour in the north. At Hyane the convoy entered harbour without incident, but the minesweeping group ran into trouble immediately at Seeadler, where at least one Japanese 4-inch gun prevented their entry into the harbour. Hearing of this, Dechaineux, who with *Warramunga* and the rest of the destroyers had remained off Hyane Harbour to give support if needed, took *Warramunga*, *Ammen* and *Bush* to try and clear the Seeadler entrance to allow the minesweepers to enter. At 10 a.m. the four destroyers commenced a series of three bombardments of Hauwei Island, the western portal of Seeadler Harbour entrance, at ranges decreasing from 11,000 to 4,000 yards. There was no response from the shore during the bombardments, and Dechaineux instructed *Mullany* to stand by the minesweepers during a second attempt to enter the harbour, while *Warramunga*, with *Ammen* and *Bush*, hastened back to Hyane, whence had come a report of heavy firing on shore which roused apprehensions for the safety of the discharging L.S.T's.

Back at Hyane, the destroyers bombarded targets designated by the troops on shore. Meanwhile the second attempt by *Mullany* and the minesweepers to enter Seeadler Harbour was repulsed by the Japanese battery on Hauwei Island whose crew, as had those of the guns at Hyane Harbour, played possum while the destroyers bombarded but came to life again when the bombardment ceased. Dechaineux ordered *Mullany* and her consorts to abandon the attempt and to join him. At about 6 p.m. the L.S.T's in Hyane Harbour had retracted and were leaving. While *Welles* (which had joined that morning with *Long*) and *Stockton* screened the L.S.T's, *Warramunga*, *Bush*, *Mullany* and *Ammen* heavily bombarded the northern "claw" of the entrance to Hyane Harbour, and later provided an anti-aircraft/submarine screen for the L.S.T's on their passage to Cape Cretin until an instruction was received from Barbey for *Warramunga*, *Mullany*, *Ammen* and *Welles* to remain off Los Negros. The four ships patrolled 15 to 20 miles N.N.E. of Hyane until 7.30 a.m. on the 3rd, when they returned to Hyane.

At 8 a.m. Dechaineux detached *Mullany* and *Ammen* to "knock out" the defences of Hauwei Island. The two destroyers bombarded from 8,000 and later 4,000 yards, and exploded two ammunition dumps. But during their 4,000 yards runs the destroyers came under a rapid and fairly accurate fire from four or five guns, and retired under smoke in accordance with their directive from Dechaineux, who now ordered them to rejoin him while he informed Barbey of the inability to silence the Hauwei defences.

<sup>9</sup> *Long*, US minesweeper (conv. 1940), 1,060 tons, three 3-in guns, 30 kts. Sunk Lingayen Gulf, 6 Jan 1945.

On 26th February, the day *Warramunga* and *Ammen* were detached from Task Force 74 to operate temporarily with Task Force 76, U.S.S. *Boise* was also detached to go to Sydney for her period of liberty and upkeep. *Shropshire* was thus the sole representative of Task Force 74 in Milne Bay. She sailed thence on 29th February and arrived at 3 a.m. next day at Sudest where, that afternoon, she was joined by TF74.2 on its retirement from the Admiralties. In the evening of 2nd March Crutchley, in *Shropshire*, received instructions from Kinkaid for Task Force 74 to cover the Admiralty operations from an area to the north and north-west of the islands. At 11 p.m. the Task Force—*Shropshire* (flag), *Phoenix*, *Nashville*, *Daly*, *Hutchins*, *Beale* and *Bache*—sailed from Sudest via Vitiaz Strait to its covering area where it arrived during the night of 3rd March. Next morning Crutchley was instructed by Kinkaid to destroy by bombardment the Japanese guns on Hauwei Island, estimated at five of 3-inch calibre, disposed along the shore line at the eastern end of the island. The bombardment by *Shropshire*, *Nashville*, *Phoenix*, *Daly* and *Hutchins* was carried out between 4.15 and 5.15 that afternoon, 4th March, after which the Task Force resumed its covering patrol. The bombardment was apparently successful, though Crutchley, in his report to Kinkaid (dated 6th March) remarked that "since there was no landing party available to secure the guns following upon the destruction and demoralisation caused by heavy bombardment, the operation was not complete. Even if all guns had been put out of action . . . a percentage of the enemy battery was likely to be repaired by robbing Peter to pay Paul."

Meanwhile the Americans were being hard pressed in their Hyane positions. During the morning of 3rd March *Warramunga* and *Welles* answered fire requests for bombardment of Japanese positions on the eastern edge of Manus Island west of Hyane Harbour, and in the late afternoon responded to a call for heavy concentration of fire on the native skidway, a causeway on the western side of the harbour opposite the entrance, connecting the Momote area with the northern part of Los Negros. For some time Dechaineux was unable to establish the authenticity of this call, which "the originator was unable to authenticate in the normal manner; however, eventually doubts were removed and *Warramunga*, followed by *Welles* followed by *Ammen*, expended 50, 60 and 150 rounds per ship respectively". That night Dechaineux had intended carrying out a barge sweep in response to a request from Brigadier-General Chase, but at 9.50 four "Bettys" (navy medium bombers) attacked the destroyers, and it was early morning on the 4th when the sweep commenced, and soon after—at 5.15 a.m.—there was a call from shore for fire on the skidway. "*Warramunga* responded at 5.30 with 30 rounds followed by *Welles* with 50 rounds. The evident relief in the voice of the originator when fire was opened gave indication of the situation ashore."<sup>1</sup>

That morning the second lot of reinforcements—Echelon 3—arrived

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<sup>1</sup> *Warramunga*, Report of Proceedings, 29th February to 6th March 1944.

at Hyane Harbour. Among the ships taking part was another Australian destroyer, *Arunta* (Commander Buchanan).<sup>2</sup> *Arunta* completed her refit in Sydney and sailed thence on 26th February. She reached Cape Sudest on 2nd March and there joined Captain Carter's Task Unit 76.1.3, comprising destroyers *Flusser* (S.O.), *Drayton*, *Smith*, *Wilkes*, *Swanson*, *Nicholson*, *Stevenson*, *Thorn*,<sup>3</sup> *Arunta*, and Task Unit 76.1.2, the destroyer transports *Humphreys*, *Brooks* and *Sands*. Each of the destroyers embarked 100 troops and two tons of stores and equipment, and each of the destroyer-transports 170 troops and five tons of stores and equipment, and the combined force sailed at 11.30 a.m. on the 3rd and arrived at Hyane Harbour at 7.50 a.m. next day. Debarkation began at 8 a.m. On arrival *Arunta* reported to *Warramunga* as additional fire support unit and an initial bombardment was conducted on the northern arm of the harbour entrance and the western beach opposite the entrance. Captain Carter later reported:

The first wave of boats crossed the destroyer line at 0827 and proceeded into the harbour. Fire from Target 12 [northern entrance arm] had been silenced by *Drayton*, *Warramunga* and *Arunta*. It broke out again from time to time, a machine-gun nest on the west side of the north point being particularly troublesome. *Mullany* made a close run by the beach and worked this nest over thoroughly with her after guns. Fire again broke out, and *Drayton* was directed to put five salvos of common projectiles into the nest at 0930. This silenced the guns permanently. The landing proceeded as fast as practicable. About one dozen landing craft from the beach augmented the LCPR's from the transport destroyers. At 1200 all personnel had been landed without casualties, boats had been recovered, and the unit withdrew at 1215. The return trip to Sudest was made without incident, the Task Unit arriving at 0920, 5th March 1944.<sup>4</sup>

There was a change in the composition of the Task Unit on its return voyage from Hyane Harbour. Destroyers *Wilkes*, *Nicholson*, *Swanson* and *Smith* remained at the Admiralties, relieving *Warramunga*, *Ammen*, *Mullany* and *Welles* which returned with the Task Unit to Sudest, where they arrived at 9.20 on the 5th. Captain Dechaineux recorded of *Warramunga*'s experience in the Admiralties:

This operation was most interesting and had a splendid effect on the spirits of the *Warramunga* ship's company. Without the aid of S.G. [Radar] none of the night and indirect bombardments would have been possible, navigation in the poorly charted waters would have been most hazardous and land selection by day most difficult.

The above was the penultimate paragraph in Dechaineux's final Report of Proceedings from *Warramunga*. The last paragraph read: "Commander

<sup>2</sup> Capt A. E. Buchanan, DSO; RAN. Dir of Ops, Navy Office 1940-41; on staff Chief of Combined Ops, London 1942; Dir of Combined Ops, Australia 1943; comd HMAS *Arunta* 1943-45. B. Melbourne, 10 Aug 1903. Buchanan succeeded Morrow in command of *Arunta* in August 1943, when Morrow was appointed Commander (D) at Sydney prior to his appointment in January 1944 as Commander (D) Milne Bay.

<sup>3</sup> *Wilkes*, *Swanson*, *Nicholson* and *Thorn*, US destroyers (1941-43), 1,630 tons, four 5-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

<sup>4</sup> Reinforcement of Los Negros Island. Action Report, dated 9th March 1944, by Captain Jesse H. Carter, Com. T.U. 76.1.3.

N. A. Mackinnon<sup>5</sup> joined at 0700 6th March and assumed command at 1200 on that day. Captain Dechaineux departed by air 0500 7th March to join H.M.A.S. *Australia*."

In the meantime no headway had been made in the attempts to enter Seeadler Harbour, and Crutchley's warning in his report on the bombardment of the 4th was given point on 6th March when the destroyer *Nicholson*, manoeuvring close in to Seeadler entrance, suffered damage and casualties. *Nicholson* approached the entrance in an attempt to draw fire, and after numerous passes and considerable bombardment one of two Japanese guns opened fire when the destroyer was 850 yards from the east end of Hauwei Island. *Nicholson* sustained one hit in a 5-inch gun handling room. Three men were killed and two wounded, and the gun was put out of action—but *Nicholson* reported that she destroyed the two enemy guns. This incident caused Barbey to ask Kinkaid for the task force cruisers to bombard the Seeadler entrance defences at point-blank range, since he intended sending destroyers and minesweepers into the harbour on 8th March, and orders accordingly were received by Crutchley during the night 6th-7th March. At Berkeley's suggestion, with which Crutchley was fully in agreement, it was represented to Brigadier-General Chase at Hyane that the bombardment should not take place "until forces of occupation are ready to take immediate advantage of neutralising fire". But, until more reinforcements arrived, the troops and equipment for this were not available. The bombardment was therefore carried out without such "follow up" in the late afternoon of 7th March, by *Shropshire*, *Phoenix*, *Nashville*, *Bache*, *Hutchins*, *Beale*, and *Daly*. Between 4.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. the force bombarded enemy gun sites on Hauwei and Ndrilo Islands flanking the entrance to Seeadler Harbour, and on Pityilu Island west of Hauwei, and Koruniat Island and the northern point of Los Negros, to the east. To *Shropshire*'s expenditure of 64 8-inch and 92 4-inch projectiles, the American cruisers and destroyers added a total of 1,144 6-inch and 5-inch shells. In his report, Crutchley remarked:

The result of the bombardment can be judged from the fact that two of our destroyers and two of our minesweepers approached and entered Seeadler Harbour the next day without encountering any enemy opposition.

At the conclusion of the bombardment Task Force 74 withdrew to Sudest, where it arrived at 4 p.m. on 8th March, thus terminating its participation in the Admiralty Islands operations. On 11th March the task force arrived at Milne Bay, where it remained throughout March carrying out exercises.

Three Australian ships were, however, for a while longer engaged in Admiralty Islands operations. *Arunta*, which arrived back at Sudest with Task Force 76.1.3 on 5th March sailed again next day as one of the escort of another reinforcement echelon to Seeadler Harbour. She remained

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<sup>5</sup> Cmdre N. A. Mackinnon; RAN. HMAS's *Canberra*, *Perth* and *Hobart*; comd HMAS's *Stuart* 1943, *Warramunga* 1944. Of Camperdown, Vic; b. Madras, India, 20 Sep 1906.



in the Seeadler area for five days with U.S. destroyers *Bush*, *Thorn* and *Stockton* providing protection and fire support, and during this period participated in two bombardments of the northern islands. One of these was against enemy positions on Ndrilo Island, the other in support of a landing on Hauwei Island on Sunday, 12th March. Both bombardments were from inside Seeadler Harbour to seaward, an unusual circumstance, and of that on Hauwei Island Buchanan wrote:

*Arunta* was firing from ranges inside 3,000 yards and had a remarkable view of an amphibious operation complete in all its elements—supporting fire from land, sea and air; strafing of the beaches; rocket firing support craft; amphibious craft and the landing itself, which was carried out in the face of considerable machine-gun fire.

While *Arunta* was in Seeadler Harbour on 12th March, *Warramunga*, with U.S. destroyers *Flusser*, *Reid*, *Kalk*, *Gillespie* and *Hobby*,<sup>6</sup> was escorting another echelon of six L.S.T's and H.M.A.S. *Benalla* from Cape Cretin to Hyane Harbour, where they arrived at 5.45 a.m. on the 13th. By 6 p.m. the L.S.T's had discharged and were ready for the return voyage to Sudest. Of the six destroyers which had formed the escort north bound, *Reid*, *Gillespie*, *Kalk* and *Hobby* remained at the Admiralties, and in their stead *Bush*, *Welles* and *Arunta* joined the escort for the return passage to Sudest, which was reached at noon on 15th March. *Warramunga* made one more trip to Seeadler Harbour as part escort of a convoy comprising the Liberty ships *Philip Dodderidge* (7,176 tons) and *Brenda Matthews*, between 24th and 26th March. On 27th March the two Australian destroyers rejoined Task Force 74 in Milne Bay, and *Arunta* took over the duties of Senior Officer TF74 destroyers. Excepting for *Benalla*, which remained in the Admiralty Islands carrying out surveys of Seeadler Harbour, this terminated the participation of the Royal Australian Navy in the Admiralty Islands operations.

#### IV

By 3rd April—on which day naval support, no longer needed, was withdrawn—the Admiralty Islands were under Allied control. There remained isolated parties of Japanese in the interior wilderness of Manus Island, but up to 16th April known enemy dead were 3,040, and an additional 925 were unburied. It was estimated that 275 remained effective. The American forces lost 294 killed and had 977 wounded, and the Seabees 10 killed and 59 wounded. Naval casualties were slight. With the securing of Seeadler Harbour and its entry by Liberty ships, the assault and occupation pushed ahead with landings from the north and west on Los Negros and Manus. A landing was made from Seeadler Harbour on Lombrum Point at the western extremity of Los Negros, and Lombrum Plantation was captured on 12th March, as was also Mokerang Plantation on the northern tip of the island. Hauwei Island was captured on 13th

<sup>6</sup> *Kalk*, *Gillespie* and *Hobby*, US destroyers (1942), 1,620 tons, four 5-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

March, and by the 19th Lorengau airstrip and village on Manus were in Allied hands. Organised resistance on Los Negros was broken on 24th March, and ended on Manus next day. The remaining enemy strongpoint, on Pityilu Island on the northern barrier reef, was overrun on 31st March. Major-General Innis P. Swift, commanding the 1st Cavalry Division, who arrived and took over on shore on 5th March, later said of the navy's participation in the campaign:

The bald statement "The naval forces supported the action," appearing in the chronology, is indeed a masterpiece of understatement. When asked regarding the effect of naval gunfire support the commanding general of one brigade made the laconic reply: "The Navy didn't support us, they saved our necks!" All commanders firmly believe that, especially during the initial phases, the balance of war was tipped in our favour by the superb support rendered by the naval forces.

Seeadler Harbour provided fleet shelter, and within a few weeks Manus provided for the Allies a major naval base rivalling Pearl Harbour. By September 1944 Seeadler Harbour had established anchorages for 44 capital ships, 104 cruisers and 114 destroyers. Headquarters were established for Commander Third Fleet; roads were made, aerodromes and wharves constructed, living accommodation provided (there were, in September 1944, "37,000 personnel in the area, comprising USA Administrative staff, stores and maintenance personnel, replacement ratings, aerodrome staffs, constructional battalions and technicians"), hospitals, stores, repair facilities set up. Recreation centres and officers' clubs ("with handball, badminton, and volley ball courts, as well as the usual amenities of a first class hotel") were in operation. In a report dated September 1944, it was stated:

Development of the Manus area continues on a 24-hour program in most of the undertakings. Most of the work that is being carried out is in the general area from Lugos (eastern bank of Lihei River, west of Lorengau) eastwards on Manus Island and on Los Negros Island. Buildings, invariably quonset hut type are being erected in streets, those for use as stores and workshops being built on concrete floors whilst smaller types for use as administrative offices and officers' quarters are raised some eighteen inches or so from the ground and fitted with plywood floors. Thousands of tents serve to house both white and coloured personnel engaged in the construction of the base.<sup>7</sup>

A 100,000-ton battleship dock, built in California and towed out in nine sections, and equipped with two cranes each capable of lifting 180 tons deadweight, was anchored in Seeadler Harbour, and a second similar dock was on its way out from San Francisco. Smaller docks capable of accommodating ships up to 1,000 and 3,000 tons respectively were also installed, among the other facilities necessary to provide a first-class naval base. It was estimated that by 30th September expenditure on the construction of the base was 238,000,000 dollars—approximately £120,000,000. It was

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<sup>7</sup> From "Intelligence Report on Allied Operations against the Admiralty Islands and the Construction of the Major Naval Base at Manus", prepared by the New Guinea section of the Australian Naval Intelligence Division—September 1944.

an expenditure which provided what "proved to be one of those air and naval bases, like Saipan and Okinawa, whose possession by the Allies rendered the defeat of Japan inevitable".<sup>8</sup>

## V

As stated above, when *Warramunga* returned to Sudest on 5th March after her initial operation in the Admiralties, Dechaineux relinquished command and proceeded to Sydney to assume command of *Australia* vice Captain Farncomb. This resulted from decisions reached by the Government regarding higher appointments in the Royal Australian Navy. The question of the command of H.M. Australian Squadron arose in January 1944 because of the impending termination of Rear-Admiral Crutchley's two-year appointment. The matter of the appointment of the Chief of the Naval Staff also came under consideration. Sir Guy Royle's term had been extended for twelve months in 1943, and the twelve months were drawing to an end. At a meeting of the War Cabinet on 4th February it was decided: to extend Sir Guy Royle's appointment as First Naval Member for a further period of twelve months; and to appoint Captain Collins to command the Squadron as Commodore First Class on the termination of Crutchley's appointment. The War Cabinet also agreed that the Minister for the Navy, Mr Makin, should "approach the question of future appointments to higher R.A.N. posts which will require to be considered on the termination of Sir Guy Royle's extended term", on the lines of Collins succeeding Royle as First Naval Member and Chief of the Naval Staff; Farncomb succeeding Collins in the Squadron and in the meantime obtaining "battleship experience, possibly in the British fleet coming to the Pacific"; and a suitable Australian officer being selected as Second Naval Member vice Moore. It was "noted under the above arrangements", recorded the minutes of the meeting, "that all higher Royal Australian Navy appointments would be Australian". The appointment of Dechaineux to command *Australia* was the first move in the implementation of these changes. Farncomb, thus released, soon went to the United Kingdom for courses, and in May was appointed to command the aircraft carrier H.M.S. *Attacker*.<sup>9</sup>

After its participation in the Admiralty Islands operation, T.F.74 withdrew to Milne Bay, where it arrived on 11th March, and where, on 18th March, it was rejoined by *Australia* on the completion of her refit in Sydney. The period to the end of the month was taken up in exercises, save for one brief foray by destroyers of the task force when, between the 16th and 21st, *Daly*, *Hutchins*, *Beale*, *Mullany* and *Ammen*, as Task Group 74.5, proceeded via the Admiralty Islands to the Wewak area, where they carried out a shipping strike and shore bombardment during the night 18th-19th March. On the 21st of the month Admiral Crutchley's

<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol VI, p. 448.

<sup>9</sup> HMS *Attacker*, aircraft carrier (1941), 11,000 tons, two 5-in dual purpose guns, 15-20 aircraft, 16 kts.

flag was hauled down in *Shropshire* and rehoisted in *Australia*. Six days later Vice-Admiral Kinkaid inaugurated a new Task Organization in Seventh Fleet. On 27th March Crudiv 15, and destroyers which had been part of T.F.74 under Rear-Admiral Berkey as Second-in-Command to Crutchley, became independent of T.F.74 as T.F.75. Task Force 74 now comprised two heavy cruisers, *Australia* (Flag) and *Shropshire*; and four destroyers: *Arunta*, *Warramunga*, *Mullany* and *Ammen*. Task Force 75 comprised three light cruisers: *Phoenix* (Flag of Rear-Admiral Berkey), *Nashville*, *Boise*; and six destroyers of Desron 24, *Hutchins*, *Daly*, *Beale*, *Bache*, *Bush*, *Abner Read*.<sup>1</sup>

In concluding his Report of Proceedings for the month of March, Crutchley wrote:

During the month, the capture and occupation of the Admiralty Islands by South-West Pacific forces have been practically completed and preparations for establishing a major naval and air base in those islands are well under way. Long range reconnaissance aircraft now operate from Momote in the Admiralty Islands and from Nadzab in New Guinea. The enemy base at Madang is sorely beleaguered. A series of heavy air strikes have driven enemy air strength from Wewak to Hollandia. At the end of the month severe aerial bombardment of Hollandia was undertaken with success. In New Britain, Allied forces now control westward from the line Talasea-Gasmata, and constant air attacks by Soupac forces has reduced the former major base at Rabaul. The isolation of Rabaul and Kavieng has been completed by the capture and occupation of Emirau by Soupac forces.

Emirau Island (which figured earlier in the war as the island on which the German Pacific raiders, in December 1940, landed the survivors from the ships they sank off Nauru) was peacefully occupied by the American 4th Marine Regiment; and on the same day—20th March—the old battle-ship group of the Pacific Fleet, *New Mexico*, *Mississippi*, *Tennessee* and *Idaho*, bombarded Kavieng and near-by airfields with more than 13,000 rounds of 14-inch and 5-inch shells, in a bombardment the Japanese described as “demoralising”.<sup>2</sup> Within a month from its capture 18,000 men and 44,000 tons of supplies had been landed, had turned Emirau into a P.T. boat base, and were making it into an air base also. From it the north coast of New Ireland could be kept under effective surveillance. The stage was now set for the next major Allied advance in the South-West Pacific—to the Aitape, Humboldt Bay, Tanahmerah Bay areas of New Guinea.

## VI

During the first quarter of 1944 there was another echo from the German raiders' attacks on ships at Nauru three years earlier when, on 11th January 1944, a namesake of one of those Nauru ships—*Triona* (7,283 tons), which was sunk by raiders' torpedoes on 6th December 1940, about 250 miles south of Nauru—narrowly escaped a similar fate in the Indian Ocean. About 300 miles south of Ceylon, she was torpedoed by a submarine but sustained only slight damage, and was able to make Fremantle

<sup>1</sup> *Abner Read*, US destroyer (1943), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. Sunk off *Leyte*, 1 Nov 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Morison, Vol VI, p. 423.

—her destination.<sup>3</sup> In this she was more fortunate than a number of her fellow voyagers during the period. For the first quarter of 1944 the worst area for Allied shipping losses through enemy attack was the Indian Ocean. One third of the losses from all causes in January 1944, and one half of those in February and March, occurred in this theatre. During the three months period some 16 submarines—seven German, including four of the Monsoon Group and nine Japanese—operated from Penang, and between them sank 30 ships totalling more than 180,000 tons.<sup>4</sup> The heaviest area concentration of sinkings was on the Aden-Socotra-Guardafui approach routes, where the German *U 188* had a successful run.

This boat, with *U 168* and *U 532* of the Monsoon Group, was recalled to Germany because of the difficulty in providing the Penang base with German torpedoes. The three U-boats were ordered to use up their remaining torpedoes in the Indian Ocean, refuel from the tanker *Charlotte Schlie-mann* (7,747 tons) south of Mauritius, and proceed home. The first sinking of the year, that of *Albert Gallatin* on 2nd January off Ras al Hadd at the entrance to the Gulf of Oman, led to the re-institution of AP-PA convoys three days later. The presence of *U 188* was manifested in the last week of the month with the sinking north-east of Socotra of *Fort La Maune*, *Samouri* and *Surada*, and led to the restarting of Kilindini-Aden and Bombay-Aden convoys, which had been stopped on 13th December 1943.<sup>5</sup> On 1st February, in the Gulf of Aden, *U 188* sank her fourth victim, the Greek *Olga E. Embiricos*. On the day *U 188*'s first fruit fell (25th January, *Fort La Maune*) *U 532* was active some 700 miles to the eastward, where she sank *Walter Camp* in the Laccadive Sea. These three German boats were carrying blockade-running cargoes on their passage home, and it may be that their activities in this field were associated with information received by the Admiralty which led to the formation of three blockade runner interception groups in the Indian Ocean during January. The R.A.N. was represented in one of these groups by H.M.A.S. *Nepal*, which operated with H.M.S. *Kenya* and three Catalina aircraft from 19th January until the 30th, when the unproductive operation was suspended.

The second week in February was notable in this submarine campaign for both Allied and enemy successes. On the 11th, the Indian sloop H.M.I.S. *Jumna* (Senior Officer Escort) and H.M.A. Ships *Launceston*

<sup>3</sup> There came, in January 1944, a faint Australian echo from the Mediterranean. On the 2nd of the month the former Australian Commonwealth Government Line steamer *Largs Bay* (14,182 tons) was damaged by a mine while serving as a Combined Operations ship in the approaches to Naples. She was brought into harbour and beached.

<sup>4</sup> The ships sunk were—British: *Ascott*, *British Chivalry* (7,118 tons), *City of Adelaide* (6,589), *El Madina* (3,962), *Fort Buckingham* (7,122), *Fort La Maune* (7,130), *Fort McLeod* (7,127), *Grena* (8,117), *Khedive Ismail* (7,513), *Nancy Moller* (3,196), *Palma* (2,715), *Perseus* (10,286), *Samouri* (7,219), *San Alvaro* (7,385), *Surada* (5,427), *Sutlej* (5,189), *Tarifa* (7,229), *Tulagi* (2,300); American: *Albert Gallatin* (7,176), *E. G. Seubert* (9,181), *H. D. Collier*, *John A. Poor* (7,176), *Richard Hovey* (7,176), *Walter Camp* (7,176); Dutch: *Tjisalak* (5,787); Greek: *Epaminondas C. Embiricos* (4,385), *Olga E. Embiricos* (4,677); Norwegian: *Erling Brøvig* (9,970), *Viva* (3,798); Chinese: *Chung Cheng* (7,176).

<sup>5</sup> Sources drawn upon for the information in this section include various British reports; the War Diary of the Flag Officer Commanding Royal Indian Navy; Eastern Fleet War Diary; SNOPG War Diary; Ships' "Letters of Proceedings", and action reports; *U-Boats at War*, by Harold Busch; and *War in the Southern Oceans*, by L. C. F. Turner, H. R. Gordon-Cumming, and J. E. Betzler.

(Lieut-Commander Collins) and *Ipswich* (Lieutenant Creasey<sup>6</sup>) were escorting convoy JC36 from Colombo to Calcutta. At 7.30 a.m., when the convoy was 20 miles south-east of Vizagapatam, steering north-easterly at eight knots, *Asphalion* (6,274 tons), leading the port column, was struck by two torpedoes on the port side. They were fired by the Japanese submarine *RO 110*,<sup>7</sup> and killed eight of the crew and crippled the ship, though she remained afloat with a 10 degree list. The survivors abandoned ship in lifeboats and rafts. *Ipswich* shortly reported that she was investigating a contact, and a little later *Launceston*, relieved from escort duty by the sloop H.M.I.S. *Patna*, was ordered to stand by *Asphalion* and search for the attacker. A submarine contact was established at 11 a.m., and *Launceston* made a series of depth-charge attacks resulting in underwater explosions and much oil rising. Around noon *Jumna* and *Ipswich* also delivered attacks until, soon after 1 p.m., the sloop rejoined the convoy, leaving the two Australian ships to continue the attack—with *Launceston* as senior officer, operations—and stand by *Asphalion*, whose lifeboats and rafts were in the vicinity. Shortly before 3 p.m. a tug from Vizagapatam had *Asphalion* in tow with the lifeboats alongside, and *Launceston* embarked 19 survivors from the rafts. Meanwhile *Launceston* had maintained asdic contact with the target, and about 7 p.m. definitely confirmed it as a submarine, lying on its side “with conning tower resting on the ocean bed”, in 42 fathoms. *Asphalion* reached Vizagapatam safely.

Next morning, some thousand miles away to the south-westward, another Japanese submarine was sunk by convoy escorts, but exacted a higher price for its destruction. At 9 a.m. on 12th February, troop convoy K.R.8 comprising five troopships escorted by the cruiser *Hawkins*, a corvette and two cutters, with the destroyers *Paladin* and *Petard*<sup>8</sup> as anti-submarine screen on either bow, was just south of the Maldiv Islands bound north-east from Kilindini to Ceylon. The sea was calm with a slight swell. Visibility was good. The convoy was in three columns, and was not zigzagging, but *Paladin* and *Petard* on their anti-submarine sweep were carrying out a broad zigzag. At 9.5 a.m. *Khedive Ismail* was struck by two torpedoes of a salvo fired by the Japanese submarine *I 27*. She sank in two minutes. Of the 1,407 passengers on board (including a naval draft, East African military units, American troops, and British servicewomen and nursing sisters) about 1,200 were lost, as were 150 of the crew. *Paladin* and *Petard* at once commenced a search, and some little time later *I 27* surfaced and was engaged by both destroyers. *Paladin*, steaming close past in an endeavour to lob depth charges on the enemy, struck one of the submarine's hydroplanes, and though she thus damaged herself, she inflicted wounds that prevented her opponent from diving. The issue was fought out between *Petard* and *I 27* on the surface, and *I 27* was finally

<sup>6</sup> Lt-Cdr R. H. Creasey, DSC; RANR. Comd HMAS *Ipswich* 1944-46. Of Bondi, NSW; b. London, 15 Apr 1906. Creasey succeeded McBryde in command of *Ipswich* on 5th January 1944.

<sup>7</sup> *RO 110*, Japanese submarine, 525 tons, 16 kts. Sunk off Vizagapatam, 11 Feb 1944.

<sup>8</sup> HMS *Petard*, destroyer (1941), 1,540 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

blown up by a torpedo from the destroyer about midday. There was one Japanese survivor.

The subsequent inquiry into the loss of *Khedive Ismail* emphasised the handicap under which the Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet laboured in his efforts to keep Indian Ocean communications clear. The Board recorded their opinion that the number of escort vessels and escort aircraft on the Station was "totally inadequate for the protection of valuable convoys on widely separated routes". This matter had been discussed by Admiral Somerville with the Admiralty, and he had pointed out that to provide the necessary minimum escorts for troopships would be to immobilise the fleet through lack of destroyers. In reply to the Admiralty comment that available escort forces might be insufficient to provide the degree of protection that could be desired and that risks had to be taken, he remarked that the disposing of escort and air forces to meet contingencies was related to the factor of distance. Mercator's projection was "apt to cause erroneous conclusions to be drawn when considering the Eastern Theatre in relation to others more remote from the equator. A comparison of distances between bases provided a fairer guide."

This shortage of escorts was again strikingly illustrated ten days after the sinking of *Khedive Ismail* in another successful attack by *U 188*, this time on a convoy of which one of the Australian corvettes was an escorting vessel. In the afternoon of 16th February convoy P.A.69 sailed from the Persian Gulf for Aden. Escorts were H.M.A.S. *Tamworth* (Lieutenant F. E. Eastman, R.N.R.), and H.M.I.S. *Orissa*. *Tamworth* was Senior Officer, Escort. The voyage was without incident (with intermittent air cover off the Arabian coast) until the night of the 22nd-23rd February, when the convoy was in the entrance to the Gulf of Aden. At 3.26 a.m. on the 23rd, *Tamworth's* "Report of Proceedings Convoy P.A.69" records: "First Explosion—Action Stations." Two minutes later the night was shaken by a second explosion. This was followed after a six-minute interval by a third, and another four minutes later by a fourth. A bracket of star-shell fired to the port side of the convoy revealed nothing "since we had passed a tanker listed to port considered attack had been made from the port side". It was a night of fruitless searching for an unseen enemy, and of picking up survivors from three stricken tankers. One, the British *San Alvaro*, was "on fire fore and aft. Captain stated that engine room and forward hold may keep vessel afloat after fire burnt out, making her a danger to navigation." So *Tamworth* made two runs past the burning ship at 9.10 a.m., and sank her by depth charges and gunfire. The American tanker *E. G. Seubert* was sunk by the submarine, and a third ship, the Norwegian tanker *Erling Brøvig*,<sup>9</sup> was torpedoed about 5 a.m. but remained afloat with her back broken and awash amidships. *Tamworth*

<sup>9</sup> *Erling Brøvig* and Australian corvettes were old acquaintances. She was one of the tankers which survived Japanese air attack in the flight from Palembang in February 1942, and arrived at Batavia, escorted by *Toowoomba*, on the 14th of that month, subsequently getting safely away to Colombo. (See *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, p. 570.)

closed *Erling Brøvig's* lifeboats soon after noon on the 23rd, and Eastman recorded in his "Report of Proceedings":

Captain came aboard and stated ship was hit in the pump room but engines were intact. Vessel's back was broken, and when using engines ship started to break in half. I informed him that I could not stay as I was nearly out of fuel and had no asdic. I would send a signal for a salvage vessel and pick up his crew from the boats. He could stay or come with me. I considered no useful purpose would be obtained by his staying. Captain of the *San Alvaro* agreed. Tanker could not steam and was lying with her back broken awash amidships. Captain of *Erling Brøvig* agreed so I picked up crew of tanker in position 13 degrees 14 minutes North, 48 degrees 46 minutes East.

At 1.30 p.m. on 23rd February *Tamworth* set course for Aden, "having then 133 survivors aboard, one a Lascar from the s.s. *British Lord* (6,098 tons) who had jumped overboard although the vessel had not been torpedoed". She entered Aden at 9.25 p.m., with 10 tons of fuel remaining.

In forwarding to the Admiralty *Tamworth's* report of this attack, Admiral Somerville said:

*Bathurst* and *Bangor* class minesweepers whose maintenance is a question of concern provide only token escort protection. Situation was in this case aggravated by equipment defects. Endeavour is being made to reinforce these convoys in future with a long range frigate, but troop convoys and other commitments usually prevent this.

Thus was echoed a cry which had arisen from lack of suitable ships for specific purposes nearly a century and a half earlier, when another Commander-in-Chief had lamented:

Was I to die this moment, "Want of Frigates" would be found stamped on my heart. No words of mine can express what I have, and am suffering for want of them.<sup>1</sup>

Want of ships for specific purposes was not the problem of the Eastern Fleet only, and this want, suffered by the enemy U-boats, was responsible for their inability to carry out their program of refuelling from *Charlotte Schliemann* and proceeding with their blockade-running cargoes to German-occupied Europe. On the morning of 11th February the tanker was sighted, E.S.E. of Mauritius, by a Catalina aircraft from that island. The cruiser *Newcastle* and destroyer *Relentless*<sup>2</sup> were searching for a U-boat fuelling tanker, and *Relentless* proceeded at high speed to the "farthest on" position as indicated by the aircraft and, after a search in the neighbourhood of this position, *Charlotte Schliemann* was detected by radar. The destroyer came up with her in moonlight, and obtained three torpedo hits, whereupon the tanker's crew abandoned ship, and she sank in ten minutes—presumably helped by scuttling charges—at 3.30 a.m. on the 12th, 960 miles E.S.E. of Mauritius. At the time she was intercepted, *Charlotte Schliemann* had *U 532* in company, but though she was intensively hunted for three days

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Nelson to Earl Spencer, First Lord of the Admiralty, written 9th August 1798 on board *HMS Vanguard*, Mouth of the Nile.

<sup>2</sup> *HMS Relentless*, destroyer (1942), 1,705 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.



the submarine escaped, and on 27th February was given an emergency supply of fuel by *U 178* then on her way to Europe.

Additional to the sinkings by German U-boats in the Indian Ocean in February, another four British ships (*British Chivalry*, *Sutlej*, *Palma* and *Ascott*) were sunk by Japanese submarines, in circumstances marked by callous and deliberate cruelty. In each instance survivors in boats and on rafts were machine-gunned, and—except in the case of *Palma*—nothing was known of the fate of ships or survivors until some weeks after the sinkings. There was heavy loss of life. Similar inhuman conduct by Japanese submarine commanders and crews was practised in attacks in March, particularly bad examples being in the sinkings of the British *Nancy Moller* on 18th March, the Dutch *Tjissalak* on the 26th, and the American *Richard Hovey* on the 29th.

These atrocities caused considerable concern to Admiral Somerville who, on 2nd April, suggested to the Admiralty the desirability of considering immediately placing all ships in convoy in areas subject to attack because of the possibility—when news of the atrocities leaked out—of reluctance on the part of merchant crews to sail in independent unescorted ships. The escorts available on the station were already insufficient to meet requirements. In outlining the numbers of escorts required to put ships in the areas affected into convoy, he concluded:

I fully appreciate that the Admiralty alone are in a position to review requirements of all theatres, and had it not been for these atrocities I realise it might have been necessary to accept what appears to be an undue proportion of shipping losses in this theatre. These atrocities, however, put an entirely different complexion on the matter, and I feel we cannot allow this state of affairs to continue.

In a reply six days later, the Admiralty stated that they fully appreciated and shared his anxiety, but until the impending invasion of Normandy was accomplished, the general shortage of escorts absolutely precluded any substantial reinforcement of the East Indies Station.

As it was, the month of March—with a total of twelve ships sunk—marked the end, for a while, of the Indian Ocean's distinction as being the main theatre for Allied ship losses. German activity was on a reduced scale, for the boats were going south to seek fuel for their homeward journey, and losses in the Gulf of Aden and its approaches were less than one per cent of the total of 1,946,000 tons of shipping which passed through. Only two ships, *Tarifa* and *Grena*, were sunk there. The other losses included three ships (*Tjissalak*, *Nancy Moller*, *Tulagi*) south of the Maldives, and one each in the Arabian Sea (*Richard Hovey*) and Bay of Bengal (*El Madina*). March saw, also, the final blow to the intention to sail the three Monsoon Group U-boats to Europe. On 11th March *U 188*, *U 532* and *U 168* met the tanker *Brake* (9,925 tons) about 1,000 miles south-east of Mauritius. Eastern Fleet Intelligence learned of the concentration and a hunting group comprising the escort carrier *Battler*,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> HMS *Battler*, escort carrier (1941), 11,000 tons, two 4-in AA guns, 15-20 aircraft, 16 kts.

cruisers *Suffolk* and *Newcastle*, and destroyers *Roebuck*<sup>4</sup> and *Quadrant*,<sup>5</sup> went in search. The enemy group was sighted by one of *Battler*'s aircraft, and *Roebuck* intercepted *Brake* and opened fire at noon on the 12th, with the result that the supply ship went the way of *Charlotte Schliemann*. The three U-boats submerged when the destroyer came along, and *U 168* later rescued *Brake*'s survivors. Only one of the three U-boats—*U 188*—had received sufficient fuel to reach the next supply source in the Atlantic off the Cape Verde Islands, and was thus the only boat of Monsoon Group to reach Europe. She arrived safely at Bordeaux on 19th June. *U 168*, with *Brake*'s survivors, reached Batavia on 23rd March. *U 532* cruised for a while in the central Indian Ocean where, on 27th March, she sank *Tulagi*, and then proceeded to Penang, where she arrived on 19th April.<sup>6</sup>

Though the loss of ships in the Indian Ocean during this first quarter of 1944 was not large in proportion to the number of ships at sea in the area, the loss of their cargoes was a serious consideration to South-East Asia Command, which was compelled to work on narrow margins at the end of long sea lines of communication. Delay in replacement of lost items could have a serious effect on current operations, and on 29th March Admiral Mountbatten wrote to the Chiefs of Staff:

I fully appreciate that whilst the Atlantic and Mediterranean theatres are accorded priority it may be impossible to provide the Eastern Fleet with sufficient escort vessels to afford a higher degree of protection than at present, and that similarly requirements of the Air Command and for coastal aircraft cannot be met. The only remedial action possible, therefore, seems to be very swift replacement of lost cargoes.

The reply from the Chiefs of Staff a few days later was that replacement action was taken as soon as loss at sea was notified, but that items in short supply were subject to priorities.

During March, however, there was some reinforcement of the Eastern Fleet consequent upon the Japanese fleet concentration at Singapore in the last week in February. The cruisers *Nigeria*<sup>7</sup> and *Phoebe* were sent to the Indian Ocean from Home waters and the Mediterranean; some American ships were made available from the Pacific Fleet; and action was taken to increase the air protection of Trincomalee and augment the air striking force in the Bay of Bengal.

Allied Intelligence indicated that the Japanese strength at Singapore was five battleships, one carrier, four or five heavy cruisers, four or five light cruisers, and 25 destroyers. It was a concentration that aroused concern in various quarters, including Western Australia.

Admiral Somerville was apprehensive that a Japanese descent into the

<sup>4</sup> HMS *Roebuck*, destroyer (1942), 1,705 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>5</sup> HMS *Quadrant*, destroyer (1942), 1,650 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>6</sup> The final fate of the "Monsoon Group" was that, of these three members, *U 532* reached Europe in 1945 after the German capitulation, carrying 100 tons of tin, 60 tons of rubber, eight tons of wolfram, and five tons of molybdenum, which she took to Loch Eribol. *U 168* and *U 188* were sunk by *Zwaardvisch* and *Besugo* respectively.

<sup>7</sup> HMS *Nigeria*, cruiser (1940), 8,000 tons, twelve 6-in guns, 3 aircraft, 33 kts.

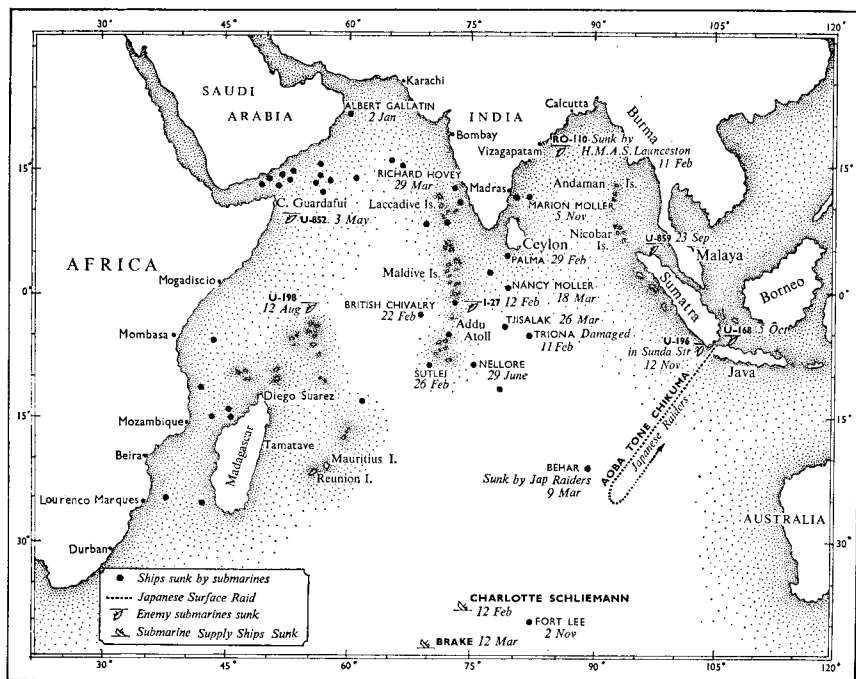
Indian Ocean, comparable with that of two years earlier, might be foreshadowed. At this period, as then, the Commander-in-Chief visualised the desirability of withdrawing the Fleet westward so as to avoid the hazard of an engagement with markedly superior forces. On 25th February he told the Admiralty that he did not feel that any advantage would be gained by keeping the Fleet at Trincomalee, and suggested that a move to a position west of the Maldives would give an opportunity to exercise oiling at sea among the islands. The Admiralty agreed that until the Eastern Fleet was reinforced it must avoid an engagement with superior forces, but said that no opportunity to engage forces comparable in strength must be allowed to pass. It was essential that Trincomalee should be made secure, and even a temporary retirement to the westward should be avoided if possible. Such a retirement would have an adverse effect on morale generally, and on prestige in India and with Britain's Allies and the Dominions. They assured Somerville of their full support should he decide that it was necessary to withdraw the Fleet, but hoped that such a withdrawal would be for a limited period only. In the event, no major descent into the Indian Ocean was made, and on 6th March Somerville cancelled the proposed movement to the Maldives.

## VII

There was, however, a Japanese incursion by a force of three heavy cruisers—*Aoba* (flag of Rear-Admiral Sakonju), *Tone* and *Chikuma*—during the first two weeks of March in a raid “to disrupt Allied communications in Indian Ocean”. The force operated under the direction of Vice-Admiral Takasu, Commander-in-Chief, South-West Area Fleet, and his instructions to Sakonju included one that all members of merchant ship crews captured were to be killed, with the exception of certain specified categories such as W-T operators, who were to be kept for interrogation. The operation was supported by light cruisers *Kinu* and *Oi* and three destroyers, which formed a “Security and Supply Formation”, to screen the raiders out of Sunda Strait, and to act similarly on their return. Aircraft from north-west Java and southern Sumatra—ten medium bombers and three or four large seaplanes—carried out deep reconnaissance in the direction of Ceylon; and three or four submarines of the 8th Flotilla kept watch on Allied movements from Ceylon, the Maldivian Islands, and the Chagos Archipelago. The three raiders sortied from Sunda Strait on 1st March and made for the central Indian Ocean, on the main shipping route between Aden and Fremantle, and on 9th March, about midway between Fremantle and Colombo, they destroyed their only victim.

At about 10 a.m. on 9th March, in overcast weather with frequent rain squalls marching before an E.S.E. wind across a moderate sea, the British steamer *Behar* (6,100 tons) was in approximate position 21 degrees south 88 degrees east. As visibility lengthened after a prolonged squall, a cruiser was sighted some four miles to starboard on a converging course. She signalled something unintelligible with a daylight lamp. *Behar's* Master

turned away, whereupon *Tone*—for it was she—hoisted the Japanese battle ensign and opened fire, quickly scoring hits fore and aft on her victim and killing three of her crew. About five minutes after the first sighting, *Behar's* Master ordered "Abandon Ship". Meanwhile two other cruisers were sighted, but they stood off and took no action. As a result of *Tone's* shelling, *Behar* settled rapidly by the stern. She capsized about 10.40 a.m. and sank ten minutes later. The 104 survivors were picked up by *Tone*, which anchored in Tanjong Priok Roads on the evening of 16th March.<sup>8</sup>



Raiders and submarines, Indian Ocean 1944

When she was attacked, *Behar* managed to broadcast a distress message,<sup>9</sup> and knowledge of this caused Sakonju to abandon the operation, since he considered it too risky to remain in the Indian Ocean when his presence there was known. On arrival at Tanjong Priok, fifteen of *Behar's* survivors, including two white women and the ship's Chief Officer, were landed from *Tone* "after rough handling on board". The remaining 89 were murdered on board the cruiser. In this atmosphere of national and Service degradation

<sup>8</sup> From an account by *Behar's* Chief Officer, Mr W. Phillips. Other information in this account from Royal Navy sources.

<sup>9</sup> On 17th March a ship arrived at Fremantle and reported having intercepted, at 4.19 a.m. GMT on 9th March, a message from *Behar* saying she was being shelled by a warship.

the *Imperial Japanese Navy* wrote finis to the inglorious story of its surface raiders in the war, and to that of surface raiders in general in the 1939-45 conflict. Admiral Takasu, immediate author of the *Behar* crimes, died before he could be brought to justice after the war. Rear-Admiral Sakonju, and Captain Majuzumi—*Tone's* commanding officer—were each sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for the part they played.

Though at the time nothing was known of the presence of the Japanese raiding force in the Indian Ocean, there were, while its ships were speeding towards their meeting with *Behar*, lively apprehensions of a possible air and surface bombardment of Fremantle and Perth which derived directly from the raiding operation. On 6th March an American submarine in Lombok Strait reported radar contact with two (or more) large enemy ships there. Actually, these were *Kinu* and *Oi*, on their way to patrol the approaches to Sunda Strait against the return of the raiding force. But the report gave rise to anxieties lest the movements presaged an attack on Fremantle and Perth, where the moon was full on the night of Friday, 10th March.<sup>1</sup> Assumptions based on the Lombok Strait radar contact, as to the enemy's route, speed of advance, and flying off position for an air attack, indicated that the attack, if it materialised, would probably be in the early morning of Saturday, 11th March—though it could eventuate as early as Thursday night, 9th March, and as late as Tuesday morning, the 14th.

Immediate action taken included the sailing of U.S. submarine tenders from Fremantle to Albany; the establishment of maximum possible air reconnaissance; the disposal of submarines for search and attack on the enemy's anticipated route; the dispersal of merchant ships in Fremantle Harbour to Gage Roads and Cockburn Sound; and the closing of the port. In Gage Roads, H.M.S. *Sussex* and H.M.A.S. *Adelaide* were anchored to give anti-aircraft protection to the eight loaded merchant ships lying there on the night of Friday, 10th March. In a four-day operation, the Allied Air Forces concentrated 140 aircraft at Perth and Exmouth Gulf. At 4 p.m. on Friday, 10th March, there was a "yellow" air raid warning in Perth, followed closely by a "red" warning based on reported radar evidence of unidentified aircraft; and next morning one of the patrolling submarines reported indications of enemy radar in his vicinity. In the event these proved to be false alarms, but at 1 p.m. on Saturday, 11th March, the eight loaded merchant ships were sailed under the protection of *Adelaide*, who then proceeded to Albany to protect the submarine tenders there and later escort them back to Fremantle. By Monday, 13th March, the situation had so far eased that normal dispositions and operations were resumed. Commenting on this alert and its results, the Commander Task Force 71 (Submarines) Seventh Fleet, Rear-Admiral Christie, remarked:

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<sup>1</sup> Information regarding this incident from a letter dated 15th March 1944, from Commander TF71, Rear-Admiral Ralph W. Christie, USN, Seventh Fleet Submarines, based on Fremantle, to Commander Seventh Fleet. Filed 7th Flt A16-3(2) SWPA Ops 1-31 March 1944.

There is no doubt that a very general and undesirable attitude of complacency had developed in this community. This threat has resulted, in my opinion, in the very definite improvement in that attitude. All hands, both service and civilian, have been alerted.

### VIII

The Australian destroyers *Napier*, *Norman*, *Nepal* and *Quiberon*, took part, in March, in operation DIPLOMAT, the reinforcement of the Eastern Fleet by American ships. H.M. Ships *Renown*, *Valiant*, *Queen Elizabeth*, *Illustrious*, with cruisers *London*,<sup>2</sup> *Gambia*, *Ceylon*<sup>3</sup> and *Cumberland*, and destroyers *Quality*, *Queenborough*, *Quilliam*,<sup>4</sup> *Pathfinder*,<sup>5</sup> the Dutch *Van Galen* and *Tjerk Hiddes* and the four Australian ships, left Trincomalee and Colombo on 21st March. About 800 miles south of Ceylon they refuelled from oilers during the 24th to 26th, and at noon on the 27th they met U.S. Task Group 58.5—aircraft carrier *Saratoga*, and destroyers *Dunlap*, *Cummings*,<sup>6</sup> and *Fanning*,<sup>7</sup> from Fremantle. The combined force arrived at Trincomalee on 31st March.

Meantime, though preparations for the basing in Australia of a British Pacific Force went forward, Somerville was told by the Admiralty on 17th March that the Pacific Force would not be required to leave the Eastern Fleet at the end of March as previously intended, and that the move would probably not take place before August. An Admiralty Mission, headed by Rear-Admiral Daniel,<sup>8</sup> had gone to Washington in February for preliminary consultations, with the purpose of examining the logistics of American task forces in the Pacific with a view to making the best possible arrangements for the reception and maintenance of the British Fleet in Australia. Daniel was told that the part that fleet would play in the strategy of the war against Japan was not settled, and

the ability to send naval forces to the Pacific at a future date, and the rate at which these forces could be added to, will depend in a great measure on the information you obtain as the result of your examination on the spot.

At the end of March the situation was thus described in a message from the Admiralty to Somerville. If the strategy provisionally agreed upon by the Combined Chiefs of Staff was finally approved, operations in South-East Asia would be conducted in support of the main operations in the Pacific. A naval force sufficient to safeguard communications, and to carry

<sup>2</sup> HMS *London*, cruiser (1927), 9,850 tons, eight 8-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, one aircraft, 32½ kts.

<sup>3</sup> HMS *Ceylon*, cruiser (1940), 8,000 tons, twelve 6-in guns, 3 aircraft, 33 kts.

<sup>4</sup> HMS's *Quality*, *Queenborough*, *Quilliam*, destroyers (1942), 1,705 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>5</sup> HMS *Pathfinder*, destroyer (1941), 1,540 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>6</sup> *Cummings*, US destroyer (1936), 1,450 tons, four 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 36½ kts.

<sup>7</sup> *Dunlap*, *Fanning*, US destroyers (1937), 1,490 tons, four 5-in guns, four 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

<sup>8</sup> Admiral Sir Charles Daniel, KCB, CBE, DSO. (1914-18: HMS *Orion*.) Dir of Plans, Naval Staff, Admiralty, 1940-41; Comd HMS *Renown* 1941-43; Flag Offr Combined Ops 1943; Comd 1st Battle Sqn, British Pacific Fleet, 1944-45; Third Sea Lord and Controller of Navy 1945-49. B. 23 Jun 1894.

out minor amphibious operations in South-East Asia would be retained in the Indian Ocean. All other available units, to the extent that they could be maintained, would be concentrated in the Pacific towards the autumn or winter of 1944. The Eastern Fleet, after the departure of the Pacific force, would form a holding and trade protection force and the Commander-in-Chief would concert with the Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia, "such naval operations as were possible with the strength available to deter the Japanese from withdrawing forces from this theatre".

Meanwhile, for most of the remainder of the first half of 1944, the Indian Ocean enjoyed freedom from submarine attack. Such enemy boats as were operating did not succeed in sinking any merchant ships in April or May, though in that second month *Geraldton*, in the vicinity of the Maldive Islands, picked up survivors from a dhow which, on passage from Colombo to the Maldives, was sunk by submarine four days previously. The Monsoon boats—*U 168*, *U 183*, *U 510* and *U 532*—were undergoing overhaul, a lengthy and not entirely felicitous undertaking.

The German U-boat bases in the Far East had to be largely self-supporting, the German staff having to struggle continually against the opposition of the lower Japanese officialdom. Most of the latter were men of peasant origin, rooted in the ideas and customs of their island country. Only among the senior officers and officials who were descended from the ancient Samurai could the necessary understanding be found to bridge the gulf between European and Oriental conceptions and ways of thought.<sup>9</sup>

During April, May and June, seven new boats<sup>1</sup> entered the Indian Ocean. The first of these, *U 852*, had a brief career in her intended hunting ground. In the morning of 2nd May she was attacked with machine-gun fire and depth charges from an aircraft of No. 621 Squadron R.A.F. about 100 miles south-east of Cape Guardafui. Throughout the day she fought off air attacks, and next morning was found by H.M. Ships *Raider*,<sup>2</sup> *Parret*<sup>3</sup> and *Falmouth*, beached and burning off Ras Hafun, and her 51 survivors were captured by a landing party from the ships, and the Somaliland Camel Corps.<sup>4</sup>

The toll of submarine sinkings in the Indian Ocean was resumed in June, when there were three victims. On the 5th of the month *U 183* sank the British *Helen Moller* (5,259 tons) about 120 miles north-east of Chagos Island; on the 19th *U 181* sank the Dutch *Garoot* (7,118 tons) north-east of Mauritius; and ten days later the Australian *Nellore* was sunk south-

<sup>9</sup> Busch, p. 252.

<sup>1</sup> April, *U 852*; May, *U 843* and *U 537*; and June, *U 181*, *U 196*, *U 198* and *U 859*.

<sup>2</sup> HMS *Raider*, destroyer (1942), 1,705 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>3</sup> HMS *Parret*, frigate (1943), 1,325 tons, two 4-in AA guns, 20 kts.

<sup>4</sup> *U 852*'s captain, Kapitänleutnant Eck, and two of his officers were tried and sentenced to death after the war for breach of laws and usages of war when *U 852* sank the Greek *Peleus* (4,695 tons) in the South Atlantic on 13th March 1944, and sought out the ship's rafts in the darkness and riddled them with machine-gun fire and grenades. It was an incident without parallel in the German U-boat service in the war.

east of Chagos.<sup>5</sup> In each instance the ship's fate was not known until survivors were picked up some days after the sinking.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the temporary slackening off in submarine activity, eleven of the thirteen Australian corvettes with the Eastern Fleet were kept fully employed escorting convoys. Two of them—*Cairns* and *Wollongong*—had a respite during May and June, refitting in Australia, and did not return to Addu Atoll until mid-July. Shortage of escorts still troubled Somerville, and on 16th May he told the Admiralty that about ten fleet destroyers would be required solely for troopship escort duties from the end of June to October, and that unless either partial immobilisation of the Fleet was to be accepted or a further frigate group was provided during that period, it would not be possible to meet proposed commitments. The First Sea Lord decided that partial immobilisation of the Fleet could not be accepted, and he asked Somerville to consider postponing formation of a proposed escort carrier group and employing the escorts for convoy protection in lieu of fleet destroyers. Meanwhile a program for strengthening the destroyer and escort forces was in hand, and Somerville was told that his escort strength would be built up to 120 as vessels became available. He announced that, as the additional escorts arrived he would replace the *Bathurst* type corvettes, and the trawlers in the escort groups, by better ships, since they were "most unsuitable for ocean escort duties, particularly in the monsoon periods", their equipment being poor, their endurance limited, and their speed very low.

Point was lent to the Commander-in-Chief's strictures by the experience of H.M.A.S. *Gawler* in June. This ship spent the last week of April in Bombay where, on the 14th of the month, had occurred a parallel disaster to that which struck Halifax, Nova Scotia, in the First World War, and Piraeus, Greece, on the night of 6th-7th April 1941. In each instance an ammunition ship blew up and wrecked the port. The Bombay disaster occurred when the ammunition-loaded British *Fort Stikine* (7,142 tons) caught fire in the Victoria Dock, resulting in two heavy explosions, at 4.10 p.m. and 4.45 p.m. on 14th April. Fires, which spread to Princes Dock, raged all night, and 18 merchant ships and three Indian warships were involved and most of them totally lost. A large area of the city was burnt out; half of the grain stocks held in Bombay were destroyed; and casualties were 336 killed and 1,040 injured. *Gawler* arrived in Bombay on the 21st, and Seymour reported:

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<sup>5</sup> *Nellore* will be remembered as the ship which picked up, from Emirau Island, the survivors from the ships sunk by German raiders off Nauru in December 1940.

<sup>6</sup> A number of officers and ratings of the Royal Australian Navy were lost in merchant ships sunk in the Indian Ocean in 1944. Most of them were DEMS gunners; others were borne for passage. They were: in *Nellore*—four DEMS ratings: PO H. E. Bates, S3748; AB R. H. Bremner, F3405; AB C. J. Brindal, F4213; Ldg Seaman C. L. Nelson, F3072. Four borne for passage—Lt F. H. Ifould, RANVR; Lt R. Y. Lee-Steere, RANVR; Sub-Lt R. L. McMillan, RANVR; AB S. I. Weir, F4045. In *Tulagi*—five DEMS ratings: PO H. R. Boyce, F2552; AB D. K. Johnson, S7029; AB H. M. Morton, PM2048; AB J. F. Murphy, BEM, PM3525; AB C. H. Webber, PA2520. In *Khedive Ismail*—AB T. Daunt, S4322; AB J. Sidey, S4994; AB R. Thornton, S5197; Ldg Seaman D. J. Williams, 22033. In *Heien Moller*—AB E. P. Berry, FV128 (DEMS). In *Ferncastle*—AB G. K. Cockram, F2625 (DEMS).



During the next few days, ships in harbour were supplying working parties to clear up the mess in Victoria Docks resulting from the disastrous explosions and fire which had occurred the previous week. Cotton waste and burnt refuse were so thick that power boats could not be used and the method employed was to skim the surface of the water with a boom towed between two whalers.

On the 25th, Anzac Day,

H.M.A. Ships *Bathurst* and *Gawler* provided a party of 80 men (volunteers) which marched to the Cathedral for a Parade Service organised by the Australian Association of India. In the evening both ships were entertained at the Willingdon Club by the association. This association invariably shows the greatest kindness to H.M.A. Ships in Bombay.

*Gawler's* "Report of Proceedings" for April and May 1944 was the last written by Seymour who, on 6th June, was succeeded in command by Lieut-Commander Dixon. It is a matter of interest, and indicative of the way these little ships worked, that in the period Seymour commanded *Gawler*, from the time he commissioned her on 14th August 1942 until the end of May 1944, the ship steamed 71,252 miles at an average speed of 10.3 knots, and was under way for 6,928 hours—44 per cent of her time.

A few days after Dixon assumed command of *Gawler* the monsoon season broke, and caused as much concern to the ships' commanding officers as did the Monsoon Group of U-boats. Dixon recorded, of the period 23rd to 30th June while escorting convoy PA80 from Bandar Abbas to Aden:

Weather was good till rounding Ras al Hadd, when we struck the full force of the prevailing south-west monsoon. The speed of the convoy at times was reduced to 4½ knots. . . . Throughout the 24th and 25th speed of advance was so slow that it became apparent the fuel situation would cause difficulty unless better conditions prevailed. From the 24th to 29th the conditions were unchanged with winds up to force 8 and seas 57.

The experience of the practical inability of this class of ship to be of any effective use as Escort of Convoy where passage exceeds six days in bad weather is obvious. If we had carried out any attacks we would not have had sufficient fuel to reach port. As it was, I had nine tons remaining on arrival in port on the 2nd [July]. In good weather, all may have been well, but under present conditions it does not appear that this class of ship is suitable for long convoys.

When this report was received in Navy Office, Melbourne, it was minuted by the Third Naval Member—Engineer Rear-Admiral P. E. McNeil, in charge of Engineering and Shipbuilding—"These ships were designed and built as A/S M/S vessels, *not* escorts." This drew from the Director of Operations, Commander Storey,<sup>7</sup> the minuted comment: "Whatever they were designed for they certainly have been used for long ocean escort jobs and have put up a highly creditable performance. Nine tons remaining in bad weather undoubtedly caused the C.O. grave anxiety."

<sup>7</sup> Cdr A. S. Storey, DSC; RAN. HMS's *Naiad* and *Cleopatra*; Director of Ops, Navy Office 1942-44; HMAS *Australia*; HMS's *Shropshire*, *Indomitable* and *Formidable*. Of Sydney; b. Leicester, England, 23 Mar 1909.

Throughout 1944 these gallant little ships, and their companies, continued to combat weather and enemy in the Indian Ocean, as their sisters and comrades did in the South-West Pacific and Australian waters and, as was rightly commented above, "put up a highly creditable performance". Also in the Indian Ocean the six Australian destroyers were kept employed, mainly in Fleet duties. *Norman*, in mid-year, had a refit period in Australia. The others, in their work with the Fleet, were now to take part in operations in association with major Allied advances impending in the South-West Pacific Area.

## IX

It is remarked above that on 18th-19th March the destroyers *Daly*, *Hutchins*, *Beale*, *Mullany* and *Ammen*, of Task Force 74, operating as Task Group 74.5, carried out a shipping strike and bombardment of the Wewak area. Wewak at this time, and in succeeding weeks to early April, was also heavily bombed by Allied aircraft of the S.W.P.A. Command; and was again the target for naval bombardment on 10th April. These attacks on Wewak were part of a series of wide-spread but related operations presaging the major Allied moves in the South-West Pacific area. On 22nd March the carrier groups of Admiral Spruance's Fifth Fleet, with battle-ships, cruisers, and destroyers, sailed from Majuro Atoll to strike hard in bombing and strafing attacks on the Palau Islands on 30th and 31st March. U.S.S. *Tunny*,<sup>8</sup> one of seven American submarines encircling the islands during this operation to catch Japanese ships fleeing from the bombing, scored a torpedo hit on the giant battleship *Musashi*, flagship of the Japanese Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Mineichi Koga, and knocked off the end of her bow on 29th March. It was only superficial damage that could "be repaired at Kure inside three weeks".<sup>9</sup> But it may have had a bearing on Koga's death two days later, destined to arise from an air journey, as did that of his predecessor. He decided to move his headquarters ashore from the battleship to Davao in the Philippines. On the evening of 31st March two flying-boats carrying him and his staff took off from Palau's main island of Babelthuap. Nothing more was heard of Koga's plane, though by a coincidence the other, carrying his Chief of Staff, Rear-Admiral Fukudome, crashed in the sea six miles off Cebu, and Fukudome was saved, as was Yamamoto's Chief of Staff, Vice-Admiral Ugaki, when the aircraft in which he was accompanying Yamamoto similarly crashed in the sea when Yamamoto's aircraft was shot down and Yamamoto killed, twelve months earlier. The news of Koga's death was kept secret until the appointment of his successor, Admiral Toyoda, as Commander-in-Chief Combined Fleet, was announced on 5th May.

On 23rd March, the day after the Fifth Fleet striking force left Majuro Atoll, the U.S. submarine *Dace*<sup>1</sup> surfaced off Cape Tanahmerah in Dutch New Guinea, 210 miles west of Wewak. From her there landed, in rubber

<sup>8</sup> *Tunny*, US submarine (1942), 1,526 tons, one 3-in gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 21 kts.

<sup>9</sup> S. E. Morison, *New Guinea and the Marianas* (1953), p. 31, Vol VIII in the series.

<sup>1</sup> *Dace*, US submarine (1943), 1,526 tons, one 4-in gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 21 kts.

boats, an Australian "Ferdinand" party of eleven, led by Captain G. C. Harris.<sup>2</sup> Their task was to gain information about near-by Hollandia, and Japanese dispositions in the area. When the three rubber boat-loads of the Ferdinand party had landed in the darkness, *Dace*, after waiting two days without word from the shore, returned to Manus. Arrangements had previously been made for a submarine to pick the party up at the end of fourteen days. Meanwhile, before that fourteen days was up, the Fifth Air Force struck at Hollandia airfields in a series of heavy daylight attacks starting on 30th March and culminating in the heaviest attack yet made—including nearly 100 low-flying A-20 light bombers—on 3rd April, and resulting in the destruction of Japanese air strength in the area. The S.W.P.A. Communiqué, No. 726 of 5th April 1944, thus described this raid:

In the heaviest attack so far made on the enemy base, our escorted heavy units followed by medium and attack planes at minimum altitude, dropped 400 tons of bombs and expended 275,000 rounds of ammunition on the three airdromes. Our heavies started the attack by destroying or silencing the antiaircraft defences, our medium and light bombers followed and in wave after wave swept the dispersal bays, revetments and landing strips. The runways were left unserviceable, and equipment and installations heavily damaged. Smoke from burning planes and fuel dumps totally obscured the target. In the air we destroyed twenty-six intercepting enemy fighters for the loss of one plane. The enemy's strong air reserves built up in this area have been destroyed at negligible cost to us. Of the 288 planes present in the area on 30 March, all have been demolished or irreparably damaged.

On that Monday of Hollandia's heaviest attack, H.M.A.S. *Westralia* (Commander Knight) was at Cape Cretin, where she had arrived from Cape Sudest on Saturday, 1st April, and where she was engaged in the tactical loading of military equipment and embarking elements of the 162nd and 186th Regimental Combat teams of the 41st U.S. Division for training. Similarly engaged in training—with units of the 24th U.S. Division at Goodenough Island—were the other two Australian L.S.I's, H.M.A. Ships *Kanimbla* (Commander Shaw<sup>3</sup>) and *Manoora* (Commander Cousin) and the U.S. Ships *Henry T. Allen* and *Carter Hall*. Task Force 74, during these early days of April, was also engaged in training, based on Milne Bay. The force left Milne Bay on 14th April and arrived at Sudest next morning and reported for duty to CTF.77 (Rear-Admiral Barbey), Commander Attack Force in the forthcoming operation.

There were other Australian ships—close on 4,000 miles away to the westward—which were on the eve of sailing on an operation closely associated with that on which Task Force 74 was about to be engaged. At 11.30 a.m. on Sunday, 16th April, the Eastern Fleet, of three battleships,

<sup>2</sup> It was Harris who led the motor launch group which, in March 1942, rescued survivors of the Japanese invasion of New Britain. The party he led at Tanahmerah in 1944 consisted of Lieutenant R. B. Webber, AIF; Privates J. I. Bunning, G. Shortis, and P. C. Jeune, AIF; Able Seaman J. B. MacNicol, DSM, RANVR (who was one of those in the motor launch group in 1942); Sergeants Yali, Mas, Buka and Private Mariba, New Guinea natives; and Sergeant Launcelot, Indonesian interpreter.

<sup>3</sup> Cdr N. H. Shaw, RAN. HMAS *Manoora*; comd HMAS *Kanimbla* 1943-44. B. Perth, WA, 9 Jul 1900.

one battle cruiser, two aircraft carriers, six cruisers, and 15 destroyers including H.M.A. Ships *Napier*, *Nepal*, *Nizam* and *Quiberon*, sailed from Trincomalee to the eastward, to carry out, at the request of Admiral King, a diversionary attack on a target in the Sumatra-Andamans-Nicobar area, "with the object of holding as many as possible Japanese air and surface forces in the Singapore area during the period when the American attack on Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea, due to be launched on 22nd April, was developing".<sup>4</sup> It was towards the carrying out of the Hollandia and related operations that all these various and diverse activities were directed.

The Hollandia operations, as did that of the Admiralty Islands, derived from the QUADRANT Conference decisions that the Allied attack in the Pacific should be in a dual advance and—also like the Admiralty Islands operation—resulted from a decision to speed up that advance by a short-circuiting process. With the Admiralty Islands operations in progress it became clear that the Japanese armies deployed on the South-West Pacific front were in a parlous position, and that mounting Allied strength justified pressing ahead with the dual advance. The loss of all important lines of communication was the Japanese downfall. In post-war interrogations, Major-General Tanikawa said:

I think I can safely say that the turning point of the entire New Guinea operation was around the early part of March 1944. The reason for this is that it was then that our supply route which is the life line of any campaign, was destroyed. On top of that, the Allied air power began to overwhelm us. . . . With conditions like this, there was not much hope of being able to use the New Guinea area to our advantage.

By this time the enemy had been isolated in the Solomons and New Britain; the American Central Pacific forces were established at Kwajalein and Eniwetok; and the *XVIII Japanese Army* in New Guinea was retreating north-westward towards Wewak. On 12th March the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a directive to Nimitz and MacArthur which reconciled their strategies and assigned responsibility for operations.

MacArthur was directed to cancel the plan to capture Kavieng, and to complete the isolation of the Rabaul-Kavieng area with the minimum of forces. He was to hasten the development of the Admiralty Islands as an air and naval base. Hollandia was to be occupied—bypassing Wewak and Hansa Bay—with target date 15th April, and was to be developed as an air base for the establishment of heavy bombardment aircraft for the preliminary bombardment of the Palaus, and the neutralisation of the western New Guinea-Halmahera area.

Nimitz was to support the Hollandia attack, and establish control over the Marianas, the Carolines and the Palaus area by neutralising Truk, occupying the southern Marianas (target date 15th June) and the Palaus (target date 15th September) to establish in the Palaus a fleet and air base and forward staging area for the support of operations against Mindanao, Formosa, and China.

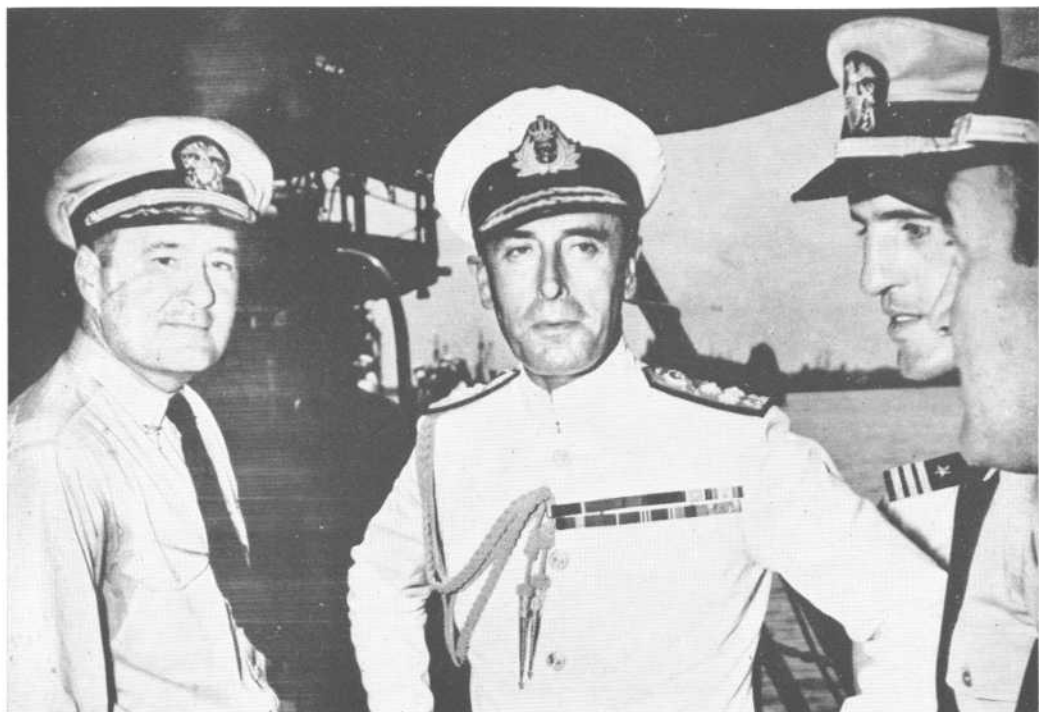
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<sup>4</sup> Eastern Fleet War Diary, April, 1944. Operation "Cockpit".

MacArthur, after the occupation and development of the Hollandia area, was to conduct "operations along the New Guinea coast, and such other operations as may be feasible in preparation for the support of the Palau operation, and the assault on Mindanao"—the occupation of which was listed for 15th November.

In September 1943 the strategical situation in the Pacific had forced the Japanese to revise their plans. The Naval High Command adhered to the Yamamoto policy of seeking a decisive engagement with the American Fleet, and Admiral Koga won the support of *Imperial Headquarters* to seek battle when opportunity offered. He was anxious for that opportunity in 1943, before the odds against Japan mounted too high; but though the Japanese contested strongly and took a heavy price in ships and men for every step of the westward advance of the Allies, a fleet action did not materialise. The Japanese planned revision of September 1943 was largely the result of Koga's importunings to establish a line which could be held to gain time both for a fleet action and for strengthening an inner perimeter. The "New Operational Policy" that he then urged on *Imperial Headquarters* provided for a defensive perimeter running from the Marianas, through the Palaus to New Guinea's Vogelkop Peninsula and on to Timor; for the fighting of delaying actions in the Bismarcks, Bougainville, Gilberts and Marshalls; and for engaging the American Fleet at an opportune moment. But time and the enemy were pressing the Japanese heavily, and by March 1944 the new defensive line had been pushed back. On the 8th of that month, after the Allied invasion of the Admiralty Islands and not long before his death, Koga issued a plan for the *Combined Fleet* to emerge, engage, and destroy the Pacific Fleet when the enemy entered the Philippine Sea.

This "Z" Plan, as it was called, demanded a concentration of Japan's naval strength and the strengthening of ground defences in the Marianas and Carolines. But the difficulties besetting the realisation of these plans were insurmountable. Allied destruction of Japanese merchant tonnage outpaced anything the Japanese could do to replace it, and thus handicapped reinforcement of the islands. The growing Allied offensive in New Guinea forced confusing reorganisation and attempted rapid redeployment of troops and aircraft on the Japanese, which militated against the formation of an adequate plan for the defence of the area. And the fatal weakness of the Japanese there was lack of sea power. The Japanese naval forces in New Guinea, the *Ninth Fleet*, was little more than a token force of small vessels and barges. The *Combined Fleet* was being treasured as a "fleet in being" for the great decisive battle. For Koga's successor, Toyoda, also held to the "great decisive battle" idea, and his first act on succession was to revise the "Z" Plan as the "A-Go" Operation Plan, from which the decisive battle eventually stemmed. In contrast, while the Japanese in New Guinea were tied by terrain and jungle to slow and painful movement, control of the bordering sea gave the Allies mobility and the ability



(U.S. Navy)

Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten with American naval officers during an inspection of a U.S. aircraft carrier in Indian waters.



(Argus, Melbourne)

H.M.A.S. *Shropshire* bombarding Sawar airstrip, Dutch New Guinea, 16th May 1944.



(Argus, Melbourne)

Ship's stewards, H.M.A.S. *Shropshire*, March 1944.



(Argus, Melbourne)

Gun's crew, H.M.A.S. *Stawell*, March 1944.

to strike at will as to time and place. This advantage they were now to exploit.

In April 1944 Japanese headquarters in New Guinea were at Manokwari, on the Vogelkop Peninsula on the north-west point of Geelvink Bay, where Lieut-General Teshima commanded the *II Army* of about 50,000 men, responsible for western New Guinea and the Halmaheras. In the Hollandia area, about 420 miles east of Manokwari, were some 11,000 Japanese, nearly all base troops. At Aitape, some 120 miles east of Hollandia, were approximately 1,000 Japanese, of whom only 240 were combat troops. The *XVIII Army*, three divisions totalling 50,000 to 55,000 men under the command of General Adachi, was concentrated in the Wewak area 90 miles east of Aitape, and the Hansa Bay and Madang-Bogadjim areas, respectively 100 and 200 miles south-easterly of Wewak. Thus the extent of New Guinea under Japanese control eastward from the Japanese headquarters at Manokwari to the Australian forward positions at Bogadjim immediately prior to the Allied attack on Hollandia, was about 930 miles, and, by the freedom of movement conferred by sea power, the Allies were now to cover half this distance in one forward leap, cutting off and isolating the *XVIII Army* from General Teshima at Manokwari, and denting the Japanese defensive perimeter to a depth of 420 miles.

The western half of New Guinea, the territory into which the Allies were now to advance, was but little known to them. That portion of the world's second largest island—named New Guinea in 1546 by the Spanish explorer Ortez de Roda because of its fancied resemblance to the African Guinea—was annexed by the Dutch from the Vogelkop to longitude 141 degrees East in 1848. It had been little developed by them. Whereas in Australian New Guinea and the Solomons in 1942 there were about 7,000 Europeans, there were only about 200 in approximately the same area of Dutch New Guinea, with a native population of about one million. These comprised a wide variety of types, mostly Melanesian. They occupied a territory of about 152,000 square miles of country containing high mountains (parts of the central chain, which forms the backbone of the entire island, has numerous peaks of 13,000 to 15,000 feet in Dutch New Guinea) and some of the world's largest swamps. From the western shores of Geelvink Bay eastward to the Australian New Guinea boundary there is only one first-class harbour and anchorage—Humboldt Bay, about fifteen miles from the border. West of Humboldt Bay the coastline runs west by north in a featureless line 25 miles to Tanahmerah Bay, and the area between the two indentations is occupied by the Cyclops Mountains, formerly an offshore island, whose northern slopes drop sharply from their 7,000-foot summits down to the shore. South of the Cyclops range, and about six miles west of Humboldt Bay, a relic of Cyclops' island past remains in all that is left of the former marine strait—Lake Sentani, a narrow body of water 15 miles long which, though now divorced from the sea, still contains sharks. Between the lake's north shore and the Cyclops Mountains is a plain, and thereon the Japanese had constructed three airfields.



Another airfield was, early in 1944, under construction by the Japanese at Tami, on the coastal plain about five miles east of Humboldt Bay. Thus the region Humboldt-Tanahmerah, with first-class harbour and anchorage, and three airfields already built, offered the best site short of Geelvink Bay for developing into a naval, air, and supply base.

It has been remarked that Nimitz was to support the Hollandia operation, but since his carriers could furnish air cover and support for only a limited period, an airfield from which the Fifth Army Air Force could take over as soon as possible was needed. No such Allied base existed—that at Nadzab was too distant for efficient air support. But there was a Japanese air strip at Tadj, eight miles south-east of Aitape and about 125 miles E.S.E. of Hollandia, only a quarter of the distance of Nadzab therefrom. Aircraft based there could easily support Hollandia, and possession of Aitape would impose a hurdle between Adachi's *XVIII Army* at Wewak and Hollandia, should he try to move west.

Thus it was that the final Hollandia assault plans called for three simultaneous landings—at Aitape, and in Humboldt Bay and Tanahmerah Bay. MacArthur, as Supreme Commander South-West Pacific Area, was in over-all command. Vice-Admiral Kinkaid, Seventh Fleet, was responsible for the naval side, but delegated to Rear-Admiral Barbey, his amphibious force commander, the detailed planning and actual execution of the naval phases. Barbey, in command of the Attack Force as CTF.77, and responsible for all three landings, took personal command of the Western Task Group, 77.1, in destroyer *Swanson*. Destined for Tanahmerah Bay, TG.77.1 comprised five transports including H.M.A. Ships *Manoora* and *Kanimbla*, 16 L.C.I's and seven L.S.T's; seven destroyers; and six special service vessels. The central group, to deliver the attack on Humboldt Bay, TG.77.2, was commanded by Rear-Admiral Fechteler in the destroyer *Reid*. Of 48 vessels, it consisted of three transports comprising Task Unit 77.2.2 with H.M.A.S. *Westralia* as flagship; five destroyer transports; 16 L.C.I's and seven L.S.T's; eight destroyers; and nine special service vessels. The Eastern Group, for Aitape, TG.77.3, was commanded by Barbey's Chief of Staff, Captain Albert G. Noble, in destroyer *La Valette*.<sup>5</sup> It was of 33 vessels, made up of eleven transports; seven L.S.T's; six destroyers; and nine special service vessels.

Close support for Task Force 77, with fire support and air cover at the respective landings, was provided by Task Force 74, Rear-Admiral Crutchley (*Australia*, Flag; *Shropshire*, *Arunta*, *Warramunga*, *Mullany* and *Ammen*); Task Force 75, Rear-Admiral Berkey (*Phoenix*, Flag, *Nashville*, *Boise*, *Hutchins*, *Daly*, *Beale*, *Bache* and *Abner Read*); and Task Force 78, Rear-Admiral Ralph E. Davison, U.S.N., comprising two escort carrier groups, TG.78.1, Rear-Admiral Van H. Ragsdale (*Sangamon*, *Suwannee*, *Chenango*, *Santee*,<sup>6</sup> and seven destroyers); and TG.78.2, Rear-Admiral

<sup>5</sup> *La Valette*, US destroyer (1942), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

<sup>6</sup> *Sangamon*, *Suwannee*, *Chenango* and *Santee*, US escort carriers (1942), 11,400 tons, two 5-in guns, 30 aircraft, 18 kts.

Davison (*Natoma Bay*, *Coral Sea*, *Corregidor*, *Manila Bay*,<sup>7</sup> and seven destroyers). The Fifth Fleet provided distant cover.

Task Force 74 left *Sudest* for *Seeadler Harbour*, Admiralty Islands, at 5.45 a.m., 18th April, and arrived at its destination at noon next day. Meanwhile the three groups forming TF.77 had formed up and proceeded from their various assembly areas, and at 5.30 p.m. on 19th April Task Force 74 sailed from *Seeadler* to rendezvous with TF.77, which it did—after patrolling to the north-west of the Admiralties during the night—at 7 a.m. on the 20th, in position 1 degree 35 minutes south, 146 degrees 35 minutes east; and the armada of 158 vessels moved off at nine knots towards New Guinea and the enemy.

## X

On the day the *Hollandia* attack force moved off towards its objectives the British Eastern Fleet in the Indian Ocean was withdrawing westward towards its base at Trincomalee after completing the diversionary mission requested by Admiral King in support of the forthcoming South-West Pacific operation: an attack on the Sumatra-Andamans-Nicobar area about 15th April. The possibility of such an operation, with the island of Sabang off the northern tip of Sumatra as the target, had previously been discussed in the Fleet, and a meeting of Flag and Commanding Officers discussed the question in detail on 12th April, when it was decided to attack Sabang and, after considering the alternatives of a combined ship and air bombardment, and a seaborne attack with the Fleet in support, it was further decided that a seaborne air strike was the more suitable.

The fleet sailed from Trincomalee at 11.30 a.m. on Sunday, 16th April, and formed into two forces, the striking force—Force 70<sup>8</sup>—under the command of Vice-Admiral Power, Second-in-Command, Eastern Fleet; and the supporting force—Force 69<sup>9</sup>—under the command of the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Somerville.

Course was made to the south-eastwards at 18 knots, the two forces about eight miles from each other. Catalina and Liberator aircraft from Ceylon provided anti-submarine patrols throughout the 16th and 17th—on which day course was altered to the eastward. At 5 p.m. on the 18th course was altered to the north-eastward on the final approach to the flying-off position 100 miles from Sabang. Force 70 reached this position at 5.30 a.m. on 19th April—with Force 69 twelve miles to the north-westward—and commenced flying off an air strike of 17 torpedo bombers (*Barracudas*) and 13 fighters (*Corsairs*) from *Illustrious*, and 11 torpedo bombers (*Avengers*), 18 dive bombers (*Dauntless*), and 24 fighters (*Hellcats*) from *Saratoga*. The *Saratoga* group arrived over Sabang at 6.57 a.m.,

<sup>7</sup> *Natoma Bay*, *Coral Sea*, *Corregidor* and *Manila Bay*, US escort carriers (1943), 7,800 tons, one 5-in gun, 28 aircraft, 19 kts.

<sup>8</sup> HMS *Renown* (Flag); carriers HMS *Illustrious* and USS *Saratoga*; cruiser HMS *London*; destroyers HM Ships *Quilliam*, *Queenborough*, *Quadrant*, and US Ships *Dunlap*, *Cummings*, *Fanning*; and air-sea rescue ship, submarine HMS *Tactician*.

<sup>9</sup> HM Ships *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant*; French Ship *Richelieu*; cruisers HM Ships *Newcastle*, *Nigeria*, *Ceylon*, HMNZS *Gambia*, and the Dutch *Tromp*; and nine destroyers, including the Australian ships *Napier*, *Nepal*, *Nizam* and *Quiberon*.

and the *Illustrious* group, from a different direction, one minute later. Complete surprise was achieved, and there was no fighter opposition, nor any ground anti-aircraft fire until after the first bombs had been dropped. Thereafter ground fire was intense. Twelve American aircraft were hit, but eleven returned safely to their carrier. The twelfth force-landed about a mile off shore to the northward of Sabang, and its pilot was rescued, under fire but unhurt, by H.M.S. *Tactician*.<sup>1</sup>

After flying off the air strikes, Force 70 withdrew 30 miles to the westward to a flying-on position, with Force 69 in close support. Aircraft were flown on without interference (though three Japanese carrier-type torpedo bombers were shot down by *Saratoga* fighters about 50 miles to the north-eastward of the groups) and throughout the day the combined forces withdrew to the westward at 20 knots. Trincomalee Harbour was entered in the forenoon of 21st April. The results of the strike were assessed as a large number of direct hits in the dockyard, power station, wharf and town areas; hits in the barracks, radio station, radar station, airfield dispersal area and hangars. Two merchant ships were hit; two destroyers set on fire; 24 aircraft destroyed on the ground and three shot down; and oil fuel tanks set on fire.

## XI

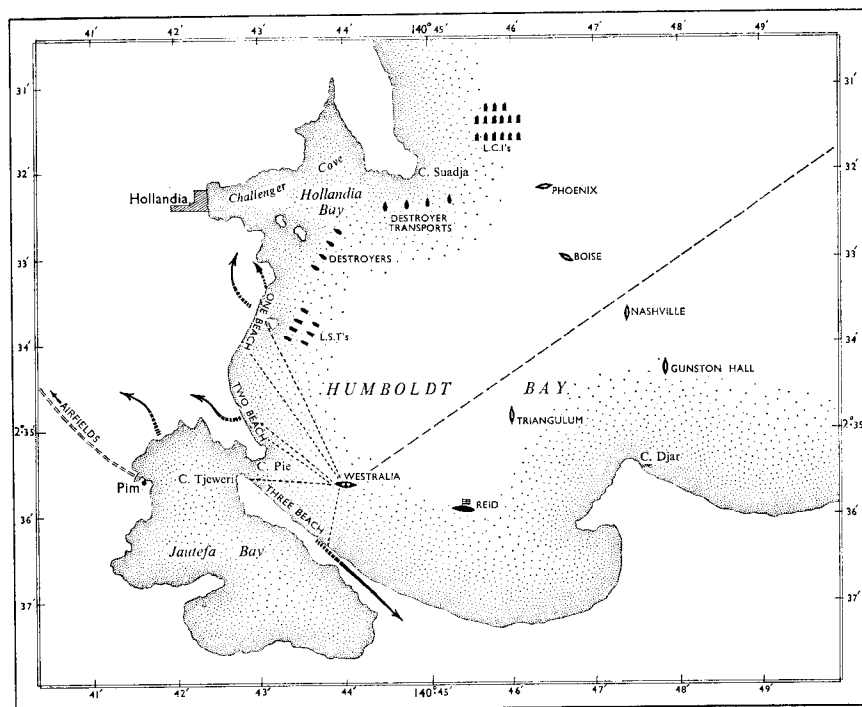
As the Eastern Fleet entered Trincomalee Harbour the Hollandia Attack Force pursued a course north about the Ninigo and adjacent islands to its several destinations on the New Guinea coast. The Attack Force ships were disposed in three groups, Captain Noble's TG.77.3, the Eastern, Aitape group, to port; Admiral Barbey's TG.77.1, the Western, Tanahmerah Bay group, in the centre; and Admiral Fechteler's TG.77.2, the Humboldt Bay group, to starboard. *Australia* and *Shropshire*, of TF.74, were on the starboard bow of the Attack Force, and *Phoenix* and *Boise* of TF.75 on the port bow. The destroyers of the two task forces, and those of the Attack Force—a total of 30—formed a circular anti-submarine screen, with radar pickets 15 miles ahead and 15 miles on the beam. Rear-Admiral Davison's TF.78 of eight carriers and their screening destroyers were disposed astern. The passage was without incident. At 6 p.m. on the 21st TF.74, with the attack transports and landing craft of the Tanahmerah Bay group, including Barbey's flagship, increased speed and drew ahead of the rest of the convoy. At 7 p.m., when about 90 miles north-west of Aitape, TG.77.3—the Eastern Attack Group—withdrew from the main body and proceeded to its destination with Davison's TF.78 in company.<sup>2</sup> About 8.30 p.m. *Australia*'s radar detected aircraft apparently forming up some 20 miles ahead, and the contacts faded in the general direction of Hollandia, 50 miles away. Soon after, a flickering glow in the

<sup>1</sup> HMS *Tactician*, submarine (1942), 1,090 tons, one 4-in gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 15½ kts.

<sup>2</sup> Davison's mission was: (a) to provide air cover and air striking groups for the Attack Force during the approach to and assault on the Aitape area, and, subsequently to provide combat air and anti-submarine patrols in the Hollandia area; (b) to destroy enemy surface forces which might threaten our convoys and landing operations, and to deny enemy seaborne reinforcements and supply; and (c) to provide air cover for Allied Air Force bombers as requested.

sky indicated that these were Fifth Air Force aircraft which had attacked Hollandia and started fires there. Around midnight TG.77.2, Admiral Fechteler's group, detached for Humboldt Bay with Berkey's TF.75.

Over a calm, unruffled sea, TG.77.1, with TF.74, continued on to Tanahmerah Bay. At 3 a.m. on the 22nd, when eleven miles in the Bay's offing, Barbey released TF.74, which disengaged to the westward, cruisers in column and destroyers in anti-submarine screen. The night was moonless,



Hollandia assault, April 1944

with rain showers along the coast. A solitary light gleamed in Demta Bay to the westward. Crutchley searched to the westward until 4.25 a.m. when, no surface contact having been made, TF.74 returned to the eastward to give fire support in the Tanahmerah Bay landings. At 6 a.m., just as day broke, the cruisers and destroyers began bombarding the landing beaches in the south-east corner of the bay. Under cover of the bombardment the ships of the transport group—*Henry T. Allen*, *Carter Hall*, and the Australian *Manoora* and *Kanimbla*—lowered their boats. TF.74 completed the bombardment at 6.30 (the cruisers fired 554 rounds of 8-inch, and the destroyers 730 of 5-inch) and proceeded to a covering patrol in the vicinity of the transports, the main landing from which was made—on

schedule and with negligible opposition—by two regiments of the 24th Division.

Meanwhile operations proceeded similarly and smoothly at near-by Humboldt Bay. Hollandia itself was on the shores of Challenger Cove on the northern arm of the bay. Here the ground rose sharply from a coral-fringed shore. The only possible landing beaches lay some two miles and a half south of Hollandia, respectively north and south of the narrow entrance to Jautefa Bay. The northern—Beach White 1 and Beach White 2—were backed by a swamp and had only one exit round the base of Pancake Hill, a flat-topped eminence where the Japanese had anti-aircraft batteries. The southern—Beach White 3—was on the long, low spit of Cape Tjeweri, the southern portal of Jautefa Bay, whose companion guardian, Cape Pie, faced it across the quarter-mile entrance. Beach White 3 also had only one exit. From a place called Pim, on the inner shore of Jautefa Bay opposite the entrance, a road led over a hill to Lake Sentani.

The Humboldt Bay Attack Group arrived in the transport area at 5 a.m. on Saturday, 22nd April. In *Westralia*, the initial waves to land at 7 a.m. were rail loaded, and Commander Knight ordered them to be lowered at 5.30. (One man fell overboard, but was rescued later.) The bombardment by Berkey's cruisers and destroyers began at 6 a.m. and was, Knight observed, "effective and spectacular, being followed by carrier aircraft bombing and rocket strafing of the landing beaches". Just before Berkey opened fire, gun flashes were sighted to the westward: "Obviously *Australia* and *Shropshire* bombarding Tanahmerah Bay." At 6.5 a.m. *Westralia*'s first boatloads of troops left for shore. It was dawn at 6.5 a.m., and eighteen minutes later the last boat of the first wave left the ship. The cruisers' bombardment continued unabated, and the first return fire, "apparently from A/A battery" recorded Knight, was sighted at sunrise at 6.33. Aircraft dive-bombed along the beach, whence huge columns of smoke climbed high into the air. The first wave of troops landed on Beach White 1 at 7.3 unopposed. Succeeding waves beached in order without incident, and by 9 a.m. all L.S.T's were on the beach and unloading. Captain Bern Anderson, U.S.N., commander of the Control Group in the inner control vessel, *SC703*,<sup>3</sup> went ashore at Beach White 1 at that hour, and found

an excellent sandy beach with all LSTs beached with dry ramps, and unloading was proceeding satisfactorily. The beach frontage, suitable for dumping supplies, was about 50 yards wide and was filled with large quantities of Japanese supplies of all kinds, including large dumps of rations, ammunition, and aerial bombs. The leading waves of troops found partially eaten bowls of rice and still warm tea on the tables in the enemy tents on the beach, indicating that enemy personnel had abandoned and fled from the area upon the commencement of bombardment or shortly thereafter. No effort had been made to destroy supplies or set booby traps, nor were any beach defences manned. . . . The only enemy resistance encountered in the beach area came from isolated machine-guns apparently trapped between the landing point and Cape Pie. By 1000 these were cleared out and Beach White 1 was secure. Our troops moved rapidly off the beach according to plan [at 9.30

<sup>3</sup> *SC703*, US submarine chaser (1942), one 40-mm gun, 20 kts.

those watching from *Westralia* saw troops reach the "crest of bald hill behind Cape Pie apparently following native trail"] and by the afternoon of D-day were well beyond their first phase line.<sup>4</sup>

General Krueger, MacArthur's co-ordinator of plans and commander of the Sixth American Army, observed in his report that "the headlong flight of the enemy at the appearance of the Aitape and Hollandia Task Forces was an event unparalleled in the history of our campaign against the Japanese. Not only did the majority flee without a show of resistance, but those who remained to fight failed to offer any type of resistance we have come to regard as characteristic of the Japanese."<sup>5</sup> At Hollandia, 611 were captured.

By noon on the 22nd *Westralia* was 80 per cent discharged, and Knight recorded that at that time fires were still burning fiercely around the harbour, heavy rain was falling and visibility in the harbour was poor, and there was continuous air cover by aircraft from the carriers. Discharging was completed at 2 p.m., and three minutes later *Westralia* started to weigh anchor. By eight minutes past two she was under way, and at 2.40 p.m. cleared harbour and proceeded.

While events were thus in train at Tanahmerah and Humboldt Bays, the landing at Aitape had proceeded smoothly against only token resistance and with but 15 casualties—2 killed and 13 wounded—among the invaders. Japanese strength at Aitape was estimated at 3,500, including 1,500 combat troops. In fact, in the entire area at the time of the landing there were about 1,000, of whom only 240 were combat troops. But so far as Captain Noble knew before the landing, the 1,200-yard landing beach, and the four islands which lie off the coast, could have harboured many defenders and dangers. His six destroyers, and as many other craft as could lend a hand, covered as much of the area as possible in an intensive bombardment from about 6 a.m., and aircraft from the two carrier groups strafed the beach and roads thence to Tadjai airstrip, a mile away. The landing by the 163rd Regimental Combat Team of the 41st U.S. Division under Major-General Jens A. Doe, at 6.45 a.m. in nine waves on a two-battalion front, was opposed only by scattered rifle fire, and here, as at Humboldt Bay, the invaders found breakfasts still cooking and bunks in disorder. There were Australians in this landing, for at 7 a.m. a Royal Australian Air Force detachment waded ashore with the fourth wave.

They were followed a half hour later by the headquarters of No. 62 Works Wing, the main party of No. 13 Survey and Design Unit, No. 22 Medical Clearing Station and No. 7 Mobile Works Squadron, commanded by Flight Lieutenant Barlow.<sup>6</sup> By noon the infantry had occupied the northern airstrip at Tadjai and the [Australian] engineers began surveying and pegging.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Report by Commander Control Group, Central Attack Group (CTU77.2.7).

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Morison, Vol VIII, pp. 82-3.

<sup>6</sup> Sqn Ldr G. W. Barlow. Comd 7 Mobile Works Sqn 1944, 4 Airfield Construction Sqn 1944-45. Civil engineer; of Kingaroy, Qld; b. Brisbane, 14 Mar 1904.

<sup>7</sup> G. Odgers, *Air War Against Japan, 1943-1945* (1957), p. 210, Vol II in the Air series of this history.

By nightfall the principal objective of the Eastern Task Force was secured. The Australians worked round the clock and "by 8 a.m. on the 24th the fighter strip on which steel matting 100 feet wide and 3,900 feet long had been laid, was ready for use". Less than two hours later two American Lightnings, the first Allied aircraft to use the Tadjì strip, landed on the runway; and that afternoon twenty Kittyhawk fighters of No. 78 Squadron, R.A.A.F., landed there.

Away to the westward in the Tanahmerah Bay area, *Australia*, *Arunta* and *Ammen*, during the forenoon of the 22nd, carried out a sweep along the coast and destroyed several enemy barges and supply dumps by bombardment. *Shropshire*, *Warramunga* and *Mullany* remained to cover the landing, and Midshipman Francis<sup>8</sup> in *Shropshire* recorded how

while the flagship was away, *Shropshire* sighted a canoe coming out from the shore with five persons in it, one waving. *Shropshire* sent *Mullany* to investigate. They turned out to be a Dutch Intelligence officer and four natives. He was the only survivor of ten and had been landed some time before by the U.S. submarine *Dace*. He had considerable knowledge of the locality and the disposition of the Japanese, and was taken inshore to the officer in command of the landing.

Thus came the first intimation of the fate of Harris' Ferdinand party which had been landed in the area thirty days earlier. The man in the canoe was Sergeant Launcelot, the Indonesian interpreter of the party, who at the time believed he was the only survivor. Actually there were others, and from him, and them, and captured Japanese reports, the story was subsequently pieced together. The presence of the Ferdinand party was betrayed to the Japanese by natives soon after they landed on 23rd March. Next day, while making inland through the jungle, they were surrounded in a small open patch of kunai by Japanese, who fired on them with rifles, machine-guns, and mortars. Harris ordered the party forward to clear the open patch and reach the shelter of the jungle on the other side.

Yali, Mas, Buka and Mariba were leading and had just reached the far jungle when firing broke out. At the same time Webber<sup>9</sup> ran into the open, where he dropped to earth. MacNicol bore to the left and reached the jungle; Harris, Bunning,<sup>1</sup> Shortis<sup>2</sup> and Launcelot struck to the right under heavy fire, while Jeune,<sup>3</sup> who was last, lay still near Webber.<sup>4</sup>

Harris, Bunning and Shortis kept their enemies at bay for four hours, until Bunning and Shortis were killed. Harris, after being wounded, was captured, fruitlessly questioned by his captors, and then executed. Mas and Buka were lost—their actual fates unknown—in the subsequent attempt

<sup>8</sup> Midshipman J. W. Francis; RAN. HMAS's *Shropshire* and *Warramunga*. Of East St Kilda; b. Melbourne, 29 Apr 1926.

<sup>9</sup> Lt R. B. Webber. 1 Indep Coy, 2/10 Cdo Sqn, "M" Special Unit. Woolbuyer; of Cremorne, NSW; b. Sydney, 18 Aug 1915.

<sup>1</sup> Pte J. I. Bunning; "M" Special Unit. Shipping clerk; of North Brighton, Vic; b. Brixton, England, 27 Aug 1911. Killed in action, 25 Mar 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Pte G. Shortis. 1 and 2/3 Indep Coys, "M" Special Unit. Clerical officer; of Dulwich Hill, NSW; b. Marrickville, NSW, 29 Jan 1917. Killed in action 25 Mar 1944.

<sup>3</sup> Cpl P. C. Jeune. NGVR, 2/8 Indep Coy, "M" Special Unit. Alluvial miner; of Morobe, NG; b. Gisborne, NZ, 31 Mar 1901.

<sup>4</sup> Feldt, p. 368.

to find a way back to safety. Such a way was successfully found by Launcelot, Jeune, Webber, MacNicol, Yali and—months later—Mariba; six out of the eleven who landed.

Meanwhile, in Humboldt Bay, a detached cruiser group (Task Group 75.3) consisting of *Nashville* and two destroyers, arrived soon after the landing. The cruiser carried General MacArthur, who, at 10 a.m. landed at Beach White 1 for a close look at the operation. His inspection finished there, *Nashville* carried him on to Tanahmerah Bay, where she arrived about 1.30 p.m., and sailed thence for Aitape at 4.45, three-quarters of an hour after the L.S.I's—*Henry T. Allen*, *Manoora* and *Kanimbla*—their task completed ahead of schedule, sailed. At 4.30 p.m. the three L.S.I's met *Westralia*, and the four ships proceeded in company, via Sudest, to Milne Bay, where they arrived in the forenoon of Saturday, 29th April. The three representatives of the Australian coastal liner fleet thus concluded their first operation together as Landing Ships Infantry. It was the first of a series in which they were in the van of the Allied forward thrust in the South-West Pacific.

Task Force 74 continued until the end of the month patrolling in the Hollandia area, operating with Task Force 78 in providing covering groups. On the 24th, when the force retired to the northward to allow destroyers to fuel, *Warramunga* (as Mackinnon observed in his Report of Proceedings) crossed the Equator for the first time. "It was also of interest to note," Mackinnon remarked, "that we were some 300 miles closer by sea to Tokyo than to Sydney." He also commented on a "most unsatisfactory" situation regarding the availability of clothing and other supplies for his ship's company, particularly footwear and oilskins:

It is understood that these deficiencies have existed for some time, and requisite replacements were unobtainable in Sydney when this ship was there in February of this year. Owing to this fact, and the lack of repair facilities, many ratings are now forced to use sandals or other footwear which give totally inadequate protection to their feet. This is particularly serious in the case of engine room ratings, guns' crews, and damage control parties. The last issue of safety razor blades of the "Gillette" type was received in June 1943, and owing to the difficulties in maintaining stocks in the canteen, it has been necessary to allow ratings to discontinue shaving at sea in order that they may conserve their razor blades for use while the ship is in harbour.

The landings in the Hollandia area were hampered but little, and negligibly, by enemy land opposition. But air attack, both Allied and Japanese, caused hold-ups of the landing and dispersal of supplies at Humboldt Bay, and the destruction of much of the rations and ammunition landed on 22nd-23rd April. In one of the pre-landing Allied air attacks, a fire was started in a Japanese dump near the north end of Beach White 1 and it was still burning when the landings took place, and continued so to burn—while the beach became congested with ammunition and stores—throughout 23rd April. At 8.45 p.m. a single Japanese aircraft, using the fire as a point of aim, dropped a stick of bombs into the area and started several more fires.



The shore party tried to check them by building a firebreak, but a large Japanese ammunition dump exploded and sent burning bombs soaring hundreds of feet into the air with a tremendous pyrotechnic display which amazed and alarmed the sailors lying off shore. The fire then spread quickly all along the beach, burning fiercely through the night with numerous explosions which sent out shock waves for miles.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of this there were 124 Allied casualties on shore, 24 of them fatal. Over 60 per cent of all rations and ammunition that had been landed on 22nd-23rd April—twelve full L.S.T. loads—was destroyed. It was not until 27th April that the fires and explosions ended, and engineers were able to clean up and rebuild.

This hold-up at Humboldt Bay was a complication in that on 23rd April it was decided between General Eichelberger—in command of the RECKLESS Task Force responsible for both the Humboldt and Tanahmerah Bay operations—and Admiral Barbey that the main effort must be shifted from Tanahmerah, since the beach there

simply could not handle the huge quantity of vehicles, equipment and supplies that were ready to be unloaded. . . . About noon on the 23rd, at a conference between General Eichelberger and Admiral Barbey, it was decided to shift the main effort to Humboldt Bay. General Irving, with the two regiments [of the 24th U.S. Division] and other elements already ashore, would remain at Tanahmerah and continue the drive up the narrow jungle trail towards the airfields.<sup>6</sup>

The van of the Tanahmerah Bay column reached the westernmost airfield at Sentani on 26th April, and joined up with elements of the 41st Division from Humboldt Bay; on 28th April MacArthur's headquarters released S.W.P.A. Communiqué No. 749:

All airfields are now in our hands and in operation and our two columns are in junction. Enemy resistance has ceased, and disorganised and demoralised enemy troops have fled inland to the south-west. The operation can now be regarded as completed.

The capture of the three airfields at Lake Sentani ended the assault phase of the land campaign in the Hollandia area, but there remained a great deal of mopping-up to be done. This phase lasted until 6th June, when Army service forces assumed responsibility for the entire area and the operation was officially declared closed. It cost United States forces 152 killed and missing and 1,057 wounded. The Japanese suffered far more heavily.

Of almost 11,000 Japanese troops in and about Hollandia on 22 April, 3,300 were killed by Allied forces, 600 were captured and not more than a thousand reached Sarmi. The rest doubtless sought individual hideouts in the jungle and most of these too perished miserably. The 300 naval ratings of the *Ninth Fleet* in and around Hollandia were also annihilated. During the afternoon of 22 April Admiral Endo began to shift them and his headquarters to Lake Sentani. The last word received at Tokyo from the *Ninth Fleet* was a brief message at 1415 next day. "The enemy is approaching our HQ." The Admiral probably died by his own

<sup>5</sup> Morison, Vol VIII, p. 85.

<sup>6</sup> Morison, Vol VIII, p. 79.

hand. Survivors either joined the trek to Sarmi or wandered about in the hills until starvation and disease cut them down. The *Ninth Fleet* was de-activated and stricken from the rolls of the Japanese Navy on 10 July 1944.<sup>7</sup>

Only one effort was made by the Japanese to reinforce Hollandia by land, when two battalions of infantry and one of field artillery left the Wakde-Sarmi area, some 120 miles west of Hollandia, to march to the relief. The head of the column was halfway to Hollandia on 17th May when Allied landings near Wakde threatened its base, and it was at once recalled to Sarmi.

At Aitape the situation was not resolved for some weeks. The Allied position there was consolidated in a comparatively small perimeter about nine miles long and two deep around the Tadjai airstrip, and extending from Tadjai plantation to Rilia. It was well fortified. Away to the eastward was General Adachi's *XVIII Army* at Wewak, and for two months the only military activities of Major-General William H. Gill's 32nd Division (which relieved the 163rd R.C.T. which carried out the assault) were patrols to find out if the Japanese were moving on Aitape. They were, and in support of the defenders Task Force 74 was to take a part. But before that time came, the Task Force had other work on hand.

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<sup>7</sup> Morison, Vol VIII, pp. 88-9.

## CHAPTER 14

### THE ASSAULT ARMADAS STRIKE

AS stated earlier, in September 1943 the Japanese "New Operational Policy", forced upon them by Allied advances in the Central and South-West Pacific, resulted in their establishment of a defensive perimeter running from the Marianas, the Palaus, to the Vogelkop Peninsula and on to Timor. Instruction No. 280 of *Imperial Headquarters Navy Section*, issued on 30th September 1943,<sup>1</sup> called for the completion of operational bases and strengthening the defence of strategic points "in Northern Australia, the Carolines, the Marianas, and by constructing operation bases and thus completing land, sea, and air strength in the Philippine area by the Spring of 1944". Their *Naval Operations in the Southern Area, 1942-1945* states that

the area ranging from Western New Guinea to Northern Australia, which had been regarded merely as being of secondary importance, suddenly became the main line of defence. Moreover, these areas were generally uncivilised and remote. Consequently it was difficult to make immediate military preparations in them. The Navy had a small amount of military strength stationed for the defence of these areas. These forces merely performed guard duty and made topographical surveys of the vicinity. The essence of the defence plan for these areas which had newly become the main line of national defence, was the establishment of strong aerial fortifications in the Western New Guinea area (Sorong, Babo and Sagan) and the launching of powerful aerial counter-attacks against the enemy. At the same time it was also planned to equip Kau Bay, in Halmahera, as a rear base.

Work began towards the end of 1943, with the Navy's *23rd Air Flotilla* as the main defensive striking force: and by April 1944 it had, among others, airfields operational at Wakde, Biak, and Babo and Sorong on the Vogelkop.<sup>2</sup> The number of operational airfields was not, however, matched by the flotilla's strength in aircraft, and with a total strength of a 48-plane fighter squadron and a 21-plane reconnaissance squadron, it had been unable to hamper the Allied assaults on Hollandia.

Shortage of aircraft was a nagging problem for the Japanese at this juncture, and shortage of South-West Pacific airfields a similar one for the Allies. Even before the Hollandia operation, MacArthur's air forces commander, Lieut-General Kenney, and his deputy, Major-General Whitehead, recommended, on 23rd March, that the Hollandia operation be expanded to include Wakde and Sarmi, an area on the north coast of Dutch New Guinea about 120 miles west of Hollandia, bounded on the east by Wakde Island—lying two miles off shore opposite the village of Tum—and to the north-west by a small peninsula about 18 miles along the New Guinea coast, accommodating the village of Sarmi. Sarmi was the command post

<sup>1</sup> Japanese Studies in World War II, No. 29, *Naval Operations in the Southern Area, 1942-1945*.

<sup>2</sup> "There are approximately 18 enemy air strips within 400 miles of Wakde, and 21 enemy air strips within 400 miles of Biak Island." Commander Task Force 74 Operation Order 3-44, 14 May 1944. Wakde Operation.

of the Japanese *36th Division*, whose estimated troop strength of about 11,000 was distributed between Sarmi, two airstrips at Sawar and Maffin in the 18-mile stretch of coast, and Wakde, where the Japanese had a good coral-surfaced runway. The two Allied air commanders considered that these airfields were essential for their airfield network program. But MacArthur, with other considerations such as the availability of shipping to take into account, did not so expand the Hollandia operation. Wakde-Sarmi was planned as a follow-up to Hollandia, with 12th May as the target date; and though the quick success at Hollandia tempted MacArthur to move right on to Wakde-Sarmi in April with Hollandia reinforcements then due to arrive, he deferred to the wishes of his ground commanders that they should first become firmly established at Hollandia. But when Hollandia was taken it was discovered that the principal purpose of the operation—the establishment of bases whence heavy bombers could attack Palau and neutralise New Guinea and Halmahera—was defeated by the fact that heavy bombers could not use the Hollandia airfields. Reconnaissance photographs revealed that no site suitable for a heavy-bomber strip existed in Dutch New Guinea eastward of Biak Island, largest of the western Schouten Group, lying athwart the entrance to Geelvink Bay and some 300 miles west of Hollandia.<sup>3</sup> Lacking aircraft carriers, MacArthur's heavy bombers would have to continue operating from Nadzab, 440 miles east of Hollandia, or from the Admiralty Islands.

MacArthur thereupon decided to take Biak as soon as possible after Wakde-Sarmi; finally, when all facts such as availability of shipping and troops and the forward commitments of Biak had been taken into account, the target dates of 17th May for Wakde and 27th May for Biak were fixed.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff Directive to MacArthur and Nimitz of 12th March 1944 called for MacArthur's capture of Hollandia, for the establishment there of heavy bombardment aircraft for the support of Nimitz in his assaults on the southern Marianas (15th June) and the Palau Islands (15th September). The near approach of the Marianas target date emphasised the urgency of the Biak operation, and at the same time denied support of MacArthur at this juncture with aircraft carriers, since these were needed for the preliminaries to and preparation for the forthcoming assault on the Marianas islands of Saipan, Tinian and Guam; especially since the possibility of a major clash with the Japanese Fleet could not be discounted. The strategic importance of the Marianas was fully appreciated by both sides. A natural barrier protecting the Japanese Empire to the north, the Philippines, Formosa and China to the west, they offered to the Japanese facilities for staging land-based aircraft from the Empire and the Philippines to any island in the western Pacific; and for the concentration of offensive or defensive air power to provide cover and support for a surface force operating within air combat range. On the other hand they offered to the Americans forward bases which would serve for continuing

<sup>3</sup> The other, eastern, group of Schouten Islands lies about 240 miles east of Hollandia, off the estuary of the Sepik River, and near Wewak.

operations against Japan's sea communications; sites for airfields whence direct bombing attacks on the Japanese home islands could be organised; and a choice of subsequent moves—south-west to Palau; west to Luzon; north-west to Formosa; and north to Japan itself.

The Japanese were in poor shape to accept the opportunities offered to them by the Marianas. They were threatened on a long front from western New Guinea, through the southern Philippines, Palau and the Marianas; and the strength they could muster at individual points was inadequate to meet that which their enemies could concentrate where and when they desired. In early March Admiral Koga, after the withdrawal from Truk as the fleet base, in February, set up his headquarters at Palau. It was decided to hold the Marianas-Palau line at all costs, and he intended to direct operations from Saipan if the Americans attacked in the north, from Davao if in the south.

During March the Japanese Fleet was reorganised in recognition of the aircraft carrier replacing the battleship as the navy's most important ship. A new designation, *First Mobile Fleet*, was adopted to include practically every ship in the Combined Fleet except submarines and vessels in area organisations. Vice-Admiral Ozawa, with experience in command of carriers, was appointed in command of *First Mobile Fleet*, and he retained the command of *Third Fleet*—the aircraft carrier force—which command he had held since he relieved Admiral Nagumo in November 1942. *Third Fleet* was revised to comprise *Carrier Division One* (*Taiho*, *Shokaku*, *Zuikaku*); *Carrier Division Two* (*Junyo*, *Hiyo*, *Ryuho*); and *Carrier Division Three* (*Yuiho*, *Chitose* and *Chiyoda*). Ozawa flew his flag in *Taiho*, the Japanese Navy's new aircraft carrier of 33,000 tons, the largest afloat except U.S.S. *Saratoga*. In March 1944, *CarDivOne* was undergoing training and upkeep in the Singapore area, and *Divisions Two* and *Three* were similarly engaged in the western Inland Sea. None of these carrier groups had a veteran air group. Those of *Divisions One* and *Two* had been sent to New Britain to augment the defence of Bougainville, and had been almost wiped out at Rabaul. *CarDivOne*'s air group had been re-formed in Japan in January 1944; *CarDivTwo*'s was re-formed about 1st March in Japan. *CarDivThree*'s was newly formed in February.

At the end of March, with the Allied capture of the Admiralty Islands, it was estimated by the Japanese that the next American assault might be on Palau, target for the heavy and destructive raids by carrier-borne aircraft of Task Force 58 on 30th and 31st March. But Japanese reconnaissance reports indicated that western New Guinea was the immediate American objective. To meet this development, Admiral Koga moved most of the fighter aircraft in the Marianas to Palau; those of *CarDivOne* at Singapore were ordered to Davao, headquarters of the Navy's *23rd Air Flotilla* which, under the operational control of *XIII Air Fleet* at Surabaya, had conducted the initial air operations in the western New Guinea area. The *23rd Air Flotilla* also based aircraft at Wakde, Biak and Sorong, and for the first time during the war assumed the responsibility of patrols

along the north coast of western New Guinea as far east as the Admiralty Islands. Koga himself planned to go to Davao to command from there, as he intended in the event of an American attack in the south. It was in carrying out this move that he was killed in the air crash on the night of 31st March.

By 13th April Japanese Intelligence indicated that the immediate Allied threat was to Hollandia, not Palau, and the headquarters of the *23rd Air Flotilla* were moved from Davao to Sorong. The flotilla was reinforced with units from Malaya, Japan, and Truk; and its operational control was transferred from the *XIII Air Fleet* to the *I Air Fleet*, which was directly responsible to the Commander-in-Chief, Combined Fleet. This month saw the eclipse of the *Japanese Army Air Force* in New Guinea, after only a brief and unsuccessful career there since August 1943. The *Fourth Air Army*, comprising the *6th* and *7th Air Divisions*, had originally been based at Ambon with advance forces at Rabaul. Its New Guinea headquarters were established at Wewak; but it suffered so heavily from Allied air attacks—and lost strength also in withdrawals for employment in other hard-pressed areas—that in March 1944, when its headquarters were moved to Hollandia, it was at only half its maximum operational strength of 250 aircraft in August 1943. A month later, when the invasion of Hollandia appeared imminent, *Fourth Air Army Headquarters* was removed from the command of *Eighth Area Army* at Rabaul, and established at Menado in Celebes under *Second Area Army*. The remnants of the *6th Air Division* were destroyed in the Allied assault on Hollandia. The few remaining aircraft of the *7th Air Division* carried on flying from fields in Biak, Noemfoor, and Sorong. But until, in June, Japanese air defence of New Guinea was abandoned, that responsibility rested with the *23rd Air Flotilla*.

When it became clear to the Japanese that the Allied move after Hollandia would be Biak and the rest of New Guinea, an attempt was made to reinforce the Vogelkop with troops, and about mid-April a large convoy, *Take Ichi* (Bamboo No. 1) left Shanghai with about 20,000 troops, one of two divisions intended for Halmahera. Off Manila Bay on 26th April, transport *Yoshida Maru No. 1* (5,425 tons) fell victim to the Pacific Fleet submarine *Jack*. Ten days later, some 100 miles N.N.W. of Menado, the Fremantle-based submarine *Gurnard*<sup>4</sup>—one of Rear-Admiral Christie's South-West Pacific boats—sank three of the convoy's troop-laden ships, *Tenshinzan Maru* (6,886 tons), *Taijima Maru* (6,995 tons) and *Aden Maru* (5,824 tons). Nearly half the convoy's troops were lost at sea, and those who finally reached Halmahera were in no condition to help in the Japanese defence of New Guinea.

In the circumstances, and with continually growing evidence of the deterioration in the sea communications with forward areas, it became increasingly clear to the Japanese that their only hope lay in the mobility

<sup>4</sup> *Jack* and *Gurnard*, US submarines (1942-43), 1,526 tons, one gun (3- to 5-in), ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 20 kts.

of the fleet, together with shore-based aviation, in concentrated and coordinated attacks on approaching enemy forces. This was the object of the A-go operation, which Admiral Toyoda developed from his predecessor's "Z" Plan when he succeeded Koga. With the Allied conquest of Hollandia in April, and the increasing out-reaching of the Allied air strikes, Japanese *Imperial Headquarters* saw the approach of the "decisive naval battle" which was the basis of A-go, and on 3rd May Admiral Shimada, Chief of the Naval General Staff, directed Toyoda to issue the general order for operation A-go. Shimada's direction to Toyoda<sup>5</sup> called on him to "lay plans to apprehend and destroy the main strength of the enemy fleet on the seas from the Central Pacific area to the Philippines and north of Australia area, beginning about the latter part of May". The directive laid down that *First Mobile Fleet* would stand by in the central southern Philippines, and *I Air Fleet* would be deployed in the Central Pacific, Philippines, and North Australia area. "Insofar as possible, the sea area will be chosen close to the point where our *Mobile Fleet* is standing by."

The matter of fuel oil was a factor in the Japanese choice of the sea area for the "decisive battle". Their inability to transport oil to where it was needed necessitated their remaining as close as they could to its source—Sumatra, Java and Borneo. It was this that had sent *CarDivOne* to the Singapore area, and which now played a part in the assembly of the *Mobile Fleet* at Tawitawi in the Philippines. Until mid-1943 the Japanese tanker fleet had more than held its own against the ravages of war. But in June 1943 COMSUBPAC issued an operational order grading the tanker as a priority target, preceded only by the carrier, battleship and auxiliary carrier in that order. It took a little while for the American submarine attack to get under way, but from 21st September 1943 to the close of the year, American submarines sank 14 Japanese tankers totalling 94,399 tons. In the next three months, from January to March 1944 inclusive, seven SOUWESPAC submarines<sup>6</sup> based on Fremantle sank 11 tankers totalling 77,346 tons—one-third of the 33 Japanese tankers, totalling 251,971 tons, which were sunk during this period.

Now close to its source in the wells, the Japanese fleet did not lack fuel but its mobility was affected by the scarcity of processed Borneo oil. Though pure enough for bunkers without processing, its highly volatile elements greatly increased shipboard fire hazards if used in its unprocessed state, and orders were that it must be processed at Tarakan, Balikpapan or Palembang refineries before issue to the fleet. Thus the *Mobile Fleet* could not get enough processed fuel to give battle as far away as the Marianas. Toyoda's Operation Order<sup>7</sup> of 3rd May said that the decisive battle areas had been "roughly pre-arranged"—Battle Area 1, Palau area; Battle Area 2, Western Carolines area. The enemy would be "lured" into

<sup>5</sup> Imperial Headquarters Directive 373 of 3rd May 1944.

<sup>6</sup> *Bluefish, Cabrilla, Hake, Hoe, Jack, Rasher, Guardfish.*

<sup>7</sup> Combined Fleet Ultrasecret Operation Order 76, 3rd May 1944.

one of these areas, and a decisive battle with full strength would be opened at a favourable opportunity. Commensurate with this plan to "lure" the American fleet into the southern area, the weight of deployment of *I Air Fleet* was to the southward.

With the Hollandia landings the Japanese anticipated that the Allied thrust would continue along the western New Guinea coastline, and that Biak would be an objective. With its airfield it had been considered an important link in the perimeter defence line. But on 9th May, probably influenced by the fate of convoy Bamboo 1, and the growing difficulties of maintaining adequate communications, the army section of *Japanese Imperial Headquarters* announced that the defence line had been pulled back to Sorong and Halmahera, and that Biak was an outpost to be defended to the last man.

Meanwhile the Navy proceeded with its operation A-go preparations. At the beginning of May the major part of *First Mobile Fleet*, including Ozawa's *CarDivOne*, lay in Lingga Roads, south of Singapore, where it had been training for two months. The remainder of the *Mobile Fleet*, *CarDivTwo* and *CarDivThree*, which had been training new air groups in home waters, were in the Inland Sea. In accord with the A-go directive, Ozawa's main body sailed from Lingga Roads in two groups on 11th and 12th May, and on that last-named date the other two carrier divisions, with battleship *Musashi*, left the Inland Sea. The *Mobile Fleet* assembled at Tawitawi in the Philippines, westernmost island of the Sulu Archipelago between Mindanao and north-east Borneo, on 16th May.

The Allies had an inkling of what was happening in the Philippines. On 27th April General MacArthur issued his Operation Instructions for Wakde-Sarmi—target date 15th May. On 13th May Rear-Admiral Crutchley, Commander TF.74, issued his Operation Order 3-44, amplifying

Commander Allied Naval Forces [Kinkaid] Operation Plan 6A-44 and Commander Attack Force [Fechteler, CTF.77; Admiral Barbey had gone on leave] Operation Order 4-44. South-West Pacific Forces will, in two successive phases, seize and occupy by overwater movement the Wakde area, followed ten days later by the seizure of Biak Island, and establish at Wakde and Biak air and light naval facilities for the purpose of supporting further operations to the westward.

In an annex to his Operation Order 3-44, Crutchley informed his commanding officers that current Intelligence reports indicated that there were Japanese naval forces in the Davao-Tawitawi area estimated to be a maximum of 6 battleships, 5 aircraft carriers, 11 heavy cruisers, 3 light cruisers and 25 destroyers.<sup>8</sup> Operation Order 3-44 defined the tasks of TF.74 and Admiral Berkey's TF.75 as supporting the Alamo Force—which would make the landings—by escorting and protecting the assault convoys, furnishing fire support during the assault, and thereafter covering

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<sup>8</sup> The Fremantle-based submarine *Bonefish* reported a carrier and battleship force in the Tawitawi area on 15th May; and on the 25th a coastwatcher on Tawitawi got a message through with almost the correct count of the *Mobile Fleet*. Ozawa had under his command there 9 carriers, 6 battleships (including the giants *Yamato* and *Musashi*), 11 heavy cruisers, 2 light cruisers, and some 30 destroyers.



the landing areas, in order to help in the seizure and occupation of the Wakde and Biak areas. With regard to possible naval opposition, Crutchley remarked that strong striking forces in a high degree of readiness were assembled at Tawitawi and in the Davao Gulf.

Such forces could arrive off Biak Island from Tawitawi in 42 hours at 25 knots or at Wakde in 50 hours. They could arrive off Biak Island from Davao in 31 hours at 25 knots or at Wakde in 39 hours.

As a covering force, TF.74 and TF.75 would

operate within range of shore-based fighter cover during daylight. Destroy equal or inferior enemy forces encountered. In the event of the approach of a superior enemy surface force, engage in retiring action in order to draw the enemy into a favourable position for attack by our land-based bombers.

It was similar to the plan Ozawa hoped to follow—on a larger scale—in the projected A-go operation.

## II

On 4th and 5th May TF.74 and TF.75 respectively arrived at Seeadler Harbour in the Admiralties, after operating at the invasion of Hollandia. Fifth Air Force aircraft were now based at Hollandia and were providing cover, so Kinkaid had withdrawn the naval covering groups. For the next ten days the two task forces were based on Seeadler, exercising and preparing for the forthcoming operation. On the 6th of the month Captain Showers assumed command of *Shropshire* vice Captain Collins, who went on leave before succeeding Crutchley in command of the Task Force.

Preparations went ahead for the Wakde-Sarmi assaults. From 28th April heavy strikes were directed by Allied air forces at Biak, at Wakde, at Sawar and Sarmi. On 13th May the assigned beaching craft began loading the equipment of 163rd Regimental Combat Team at Aitape. H.M.A.S. *Manoora* and the American transport *Henry T. Allen*, which had been carrying reinforcements to Hollandia, arrived at Aitape on the 15th, and with a number of L.C.I's embarked the assault troops. *Manoora* embarked 16 officers and 462 men of the 41st Division landing team and several vehicles, and late in the afternoon the assault convoy sailed for Humboldt Bay, where it arrived at 5 p.m. on the 16th. Meanwhile, on the 15th, TF.74 and TF.75, with Crutchley as Officer in Tactical Command, sortied from Seeadler for Tanahmerah Bay.

On that day, the 15th, there was another departure on a mission associated with the forthcoming western New Guinea assaults. Admiral King had asked South-East Asia Command for some diversionary action and, since *Saratoga* had been ordered back to the United States from the Indian Ocean to refit, he suggested that on the way she should strike at Surabaya, supported by the Eastern Fleet. To this Mountbatten readily agreed, and since Surabaya was closer to Exmouth Gulf than to Ceylon, Admiral Somerville decided to refuel at the Australian port. For the operation the Eastern Fleet was divided into three forces. Force 65, of 3 battle-ships, *Queen Elizabeth* (Flag of Admiral Somerville), *Valiant* and

*Richelieu*; the battle-cruiser *Renown* (Flag of Vice-Admiral Power); 2 cruisers and 8 destroyers, including H.M.A. Ships *Napier*, *Nepal*, *Quiberon* and *Quickmatch*; Force 66, the carrier force, with *Illustrious* (Flag of Rear-Admiral Aircraft Carriers, Eastern Fleet), *Saratoga*, 2 cruisers and 6 destroyers; and Force 67, of 6 tankers and a distilling ship, escorted by cruisers *London* and *Suffolk*.<sup>9</sup>

Force 67 sailed from Trincomalee on 30th April, Forces 65 and 66 sailed from Trincomalee and Colombo on 6th May, joined forces at noon next day 150 miles south-east of Ceylon, and proceeded to Exmouth Gulf, passing 200 miles south-west of the Cocos Islands and keeping outside a distance of 600 miles from Japanese airfields in the Nicobar-Sumatra-Java areas. The fleet arrived at the refuelling anchorage at Exmouth Gulf in the morning of 15th May, soon after H.M.A.S. *Adelaide* (Captain Esdaile) which came up from Fremantle. Force 65 had arrived on the 14th. While the fleet was refuelling, Commander Seventh Fleet, Vice-Admiral Kinkaid, Commander TF.71 (the Fremantle-based submarine force), Rear-Admiral Christie, and N.O.I.C. Fremantle, Commodore Pope, boarded *Queen Elizabeth* and gave Admiral Somerville the latest intelligence. The fleet—with *London* and *Suffolk* attached to Force 66—left Exmouth Gulf just before sunset on the 15th so as to arrive at the flying-off position, about 90 miles off the south coast of Java, by first light on 17th May. H.M.A.S. *Adelaide* remained at Exmouth Gulf as guardship to the tanker force.

On 15th May, as the Eastern Fleet steamed northwards from Exmouth Gulf on its mission, TF.74 and TF.75<sup>1</sup> steamed westward along the New Guinea coast to Tanahmerah Bay. About 6.30 p.m. on the 16th, when approaching Tanahmerah Bay, they sighted the assault convoy—consisting of U.S. destroyer *Reid*, flagship of Captain Noble (commanding the assault), *Manoora*, *Henry T. Allen*, three submarine chasers and 19 L.C.I's—which had just sailed from Humboldt Bay escorted by five destroyers and three frigates. For the night run of 120 miles to Wakde the Task Forces preceded the assault convoy by about 10 miles. During this passage a strong surface drift set up by the south-easterly winds necessitated the speed of advance being reduced to seven knots to avoid being ahead of schedule. At 4.30 a.m. on the 17th the two Task Forces proceeded independently, TF.74 to bombard mainland targets at Sawar and Sarmi, TF.75 to bombard Wakde Island. Weather was clear, wind light and sea smooth; and though later mist and rain partially obscured targets, firing was effective with the help of radar and aircraft plotting. Fire was opened by both forces at 6.5 a.m. and continued for about an hour.

Meanwhile *Manoora* and *Henry T. Allen* reached the transport area close

<sup>9</sup> Six navies were represented in the Eastern Fleet on this occasion. The Royal Navy, the United States Navy, the Free French Navy (*Richelieu*), the Dutch Navy (cruiser *Tromp* and destroyer *Van Galen*), New Zealand Navy (cruiser *Gambia*) and the Royal Australian Navy with the four destroyers.

<sup>1</sup> Comprising respectively HMA Ships *Australia* (Flag), *Shropshire*, *Arunta*, *Warramunga* and US Ships *Mullany* and *Ammen*; and US Ships *Phoenix* (Flag), *Nashville*, *Boise*, *Hutchins*, *Beale*, *Bache*, *Daly*, *Abner Read* and *Trathen*.

north-west of Wakde Island at 5.45 a.m., and at once began lowering boats and embarking assault troops. By 6.18 a.m. all *Manoora*'s boats were lowered and manned, and "Ready to Proceed" was signalled to Commander Transports, VII Amphibious Force, in *Henry T. Allen*. Of this operation *Manoora*'s commanding officer, Commander Cousin, later wrote:

Credit is due to the Executive Officer, Lieut-Commander D. A. Menlove, for the smart evolution in getting away all the boats and the assault troops in 27 minutes. *Henry T. Allen*, who took 40 minutes, later congratulated *Manoora* on the excellent performance.

At 6.31 a.m., their mission completed, the two transports proceeded with an escort of three frigates, for Humboldt Bay, where they arrived in the late afternoon.

The first assault wave of troops landed on Beach Yellow on the mainland just west of Arara, opposite Wakde Island, at 7.15 a.m., supported by a rocket barrage from L.C.I's. The bombardment had effectively cleared the beach area of Japanese, and no opposition, save from isolated sniper fire, was met. The beach-head was secured on schedule, and landing and unloading continued throughout the day. During the afternoon a landing was made on Inumanai Island, whose nearest point was only 600 yards from Wakde, between that island and the mainland. There was no enemy on Inumanai and machine-gun positions were set up on its northern side. During the afternoon also, Wakde was subjected to artillery fire from batteries which the invaders emplaced on the mainland near Tum.

The landings at Arara's Beach Yellow were well under way and bulldozers were cutting access paths to the supply dispersal areas through a six-foot bank backing the beach when, some 1,500 nautical miles away west by south, the first bombs from the Allied air striking forces of the Eastern Fleet fell on Surabaya, where night's shadows marched westwards some two hours after they had retreated before western New Guinea's dawn. The fleet reached the flying-off position at first light as planned, and by 7.20 a.m. local time the air striking force was formed up—30 bombers and 24 fighters from *Saratoga* and 18 bombers and 16 fighters from *Illustrious*—and reached Surabaya, 180 miles off, about an hour later. Although half the approach flight was over enemy territory surprise was achieved. There was no air opposition, and anti-aircraft fire was not heavy. Strikes were made on the Surabaya Harbour area, the Wonokrono refinery area and Tanjong Perak and Malang airfields. Reports by the airmen gave an impressive picture of the results of the raid—Wonokrono refinery and the Braat Engineering Works completely destroyed; considerable damage in the harbour, with 10 ships hit; and Malang airfield severely ravaged, with the destruction of hangars and buildings and 16 aircraft on the ground. But these reports were not subsequently confirmed by the Japanese, whose records, made available after the war, admit the loss of only one ship of 993 tons, and suggest that fires started on shore gave an exaggerated impression of damage done.

On the Allied side, one of *Saratoga's* Avenger torpedo-bombers was lost. The rest of the aircraft were successfully flown on by 10.50 a.m., and the fleet withdrew at speed to the S.S.W., altering course to south after dark. Just before sunset on 18th May *Saratoga*, with destroyers *Dunlap*, *Cummings* and *Fanning*, were detached for Fremantle and thence to the Pacific. The fleet returned to Exmouth Gulf in the morning of 19th May, and after refuelling sailed before sunset—less H.M.A.S. *Quiberon* (Commander G. S. Stewart)—for Trincomalee, where it arrived on 27th May. The tanker group—Force 67—also sailed on the 19th for Ceylon, and after its departure H.M.A. Ships *Adelaide* and *Quiberon* sailed for Fremantle, for the destroyer to have a refit period in Australia.

As a follow-up of the carrier-borne attack, Allied aircraft from Darwin struck Surabaya on the night of 17th-18th May. Submarines from Fremantle cooperated in the carrier-borne attack by maintaining patrols in Sunda, Lombok and Bali Straits during the fleet's approach and retirement periods; and Allied aircraft maintained patrols over and to seaward of Exmouth Gulf from 14th to 19th May while the tanker force and fleet were in the vicinity of the anchorage.

In his report on operations to the Advisory War Council at Canberra on 23rd May Admiral Royle, a naval aviation specialist, expressed the opinion that while the carrier-borne attack on Surabaya was undoubtedly of value from the point of view of its effect on Japanese morale, it was questionable whether it was justified on purely military grounds. The same results could have been achieved by land bombers from Darwin without the risk involved in concentration of such a large naval force within range of enemy land-based aircraft.

By the time the Eastern Fleet was back again in Exmouth Gulf, on the morning of 19th May, the American attackers were firmly entrenched on shore at Wakde Island. The only practicable landing beach was on the west side of the southern peninsula of the island, opposite Inumanai Island, whence gunfire from the destroyers of the bombardment force and shore batteries on mainland New Guinea added to the bombardment of Wakde throughout 17th May. The shore batteries kept the island under intermittent gunfire throughout the night of the 17th-18th. At 8.30 a.m. on the 18th two American destroyers bombarded the landing beach for 15 minutes, while heavy machine-gun fire from Inumanai was poured on the Wakde shore west of the landing beach, which the landing boats, then embarking near Tum on the mainland, would soon have to skirt. About 8.50 the first boat wave from Tum rounded the western end of Inumanai and made for the beach, running the gauntlet of machine-gun and mortar fire from the flanking shore. The first boats reached the beach at 9.3 a.m., and five more waves followed at five-minute intervals. By 9.30 a.m. all troops had landed. The Japanese put up a stern defence, and it took two days and a half for the attackers to account for them—stronghold by stronghold. The final count was 759 Japanese killed and 4 prisoners. "The rest lay buried in coral

caves.”<sup>2</sup> American casualties were 40 dead and 107 wounded. By noon on 21st May the airstrip was operational, and Wakde was an immovable aircraft carrier. On 27th May—the day the Allies assaulted Biak—naval Liberator bombers from Wakde made the first air reconnaissance of southern Mindanao for more than two years. For the few months until the end of 1944, by which time it had been superseded by new bases farther west, Wakde was a key Allied airfield in the South-West Pacific supporting two heavy-bomber groups, two fighter groups, a B-25 reconnaissance squadron and part of a navy Liberator squadron. Its capture paved the way to the next move in the Allied offensive. Meanwhile, on the New Guinea mainland, fighting continued for some months, and not until September was the area overlooking Maffin Bay, some ten miles south-west of Wakde, cleared of the enemy; and Sarmi was still in Japanese hands at the end of the war.

### III

Biak, the next target for Allied assault, about 45 miles long on a NW-SE axis, and a central maximum of 20 miles swelling its mean of nine miles width, is the largest of the thirty or so islands and many islets forming the Schouten Group off Geelvink Bay. The next largest island of the group, Supiori, almost joins it at its north-west extremity. Covered with low, flat-topped, jungle-clad hills, Biak is generally steep to and fringed with coral reef. Bosnek, administrative centre of the group, and with two stone jetties built across the reef to deep water, was selected as the best of several unattractive landing places. Opposite the off-lying Padaido Islands, Bosnek is backed by a coral cliff rising some 200 feet to a flat escarpment. Only some 500 yards inland, and at one point touching the coast, this cliff extends from about three miles east of Bosnek to about six miles west, where it swings north, and leaves a flat coastal plain. On this the Japanese had constructed three airstrips: the Mokmer, the Boroku and the Sorido, all within a space of six miles. Intelligence showed a heavy concentration of defensive artillery around Mokmer airstrip, with anti-aircraft defences and suspected coast-defence guns at Bosnek. There were about 10,000 Japanese soldiers on Biak, with light tanks, field and anti-aircraft artillery; and there was a naval base force of some 1,500 men. On 17th May a force of 100 Liberator heavy bombers from the Admiralties and Nadzab struck Biak, and every day from then on until the assault there were heavy-bomber strikes on the island, and attacks on the enemy air bases on the Vogelkop by aircraft from Darwin.

Preparations for the landing went ahead at Hollandia, with Major-General Horace H. Fuller, U.S.A., in command of the ground elements—Hurricane Task Force<sup>3</sup>—and Rear-Admiral Fechteler, CTF.77 in destroyer

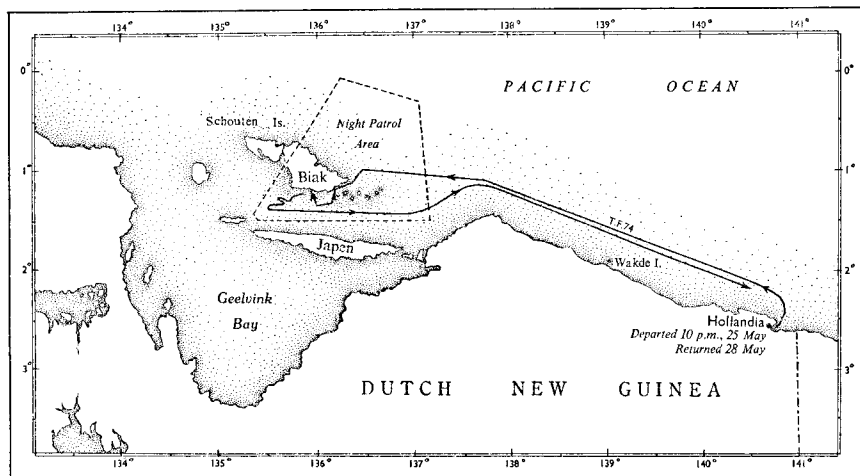
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<sup>2</sup> Morison, Vol VIII, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> Hurricane Task Force: 41 Inf Div (less 163 RCT and 218 Field Artillery Bn) plus subordinate combat and service troops. Mission—to seize Mokmer, Boroku and Sorido airfields and establish air and minor naval facilities on Biak.

*Sampson*,<sup>4</sup> commanding the naval elements. The Assault Echelon comprised 8 L.S.T's, towing 8 L.C.T's loaded with engineering equipment, tanks and artillery; 63 L.V.T's and 25 D.U.K.W's for the first four waves; and 15 L.C.I's, which could use the Bosnek jetties, carrying most of the troops.

On Monday 22nd May TF.74 was replenishing at Humboldt Bay after the Wakde operation and a four days covering patrol. On the 24th Kinkaid suspended these patrols, and TF.75, which had been on this duty, returned to Humboldt Bay also. On the 25th, Crutchley reported for duty to Fechteler on board *Sampson*, and TF.74 assumed Task Group designation 77.2 for the forthcoming operation. At 5 p.m. the main body of the



Biak assault, May 1944

Attack Force, TG.77.4, sailed from Humboldt Bay. Berkey's TF.75—TG.77.3—sailed at 9 p.m., and TF.74, comprising *Australia* (Flag), *Shropshire*, *Arunta*, *Warramunga*, and U.S. Ships *Mullany* and *Ammen*, an hour later. The mission of the two task forces was to destroy any enemy forces threatening TG.77.4; provide protection against enemy air and submarine attack; and provide gunfire support to the landing. Soon after daylight on the 26th the task forces overtook TG.77.4 and day cruising disposition was formed, with TG.77.4 and the cruisers surrounded by a circular screen of 18 destroyers, with radar picquets ahead and on each beam. No enemy surface ships were encountered, but Mackinnon recorded in his report that at 4.30 in the afternoon *Warramunga*

was ordered to investigate a surface contact reported by one of the picquets. It proved to be a large tree trunk, with branches, and on approach looked very like

<sup>4</sup> *Sampson*, US destroyer (1938), 1,850 tons, five 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

a party of men standing on a raft. The numerous large tree trunks and logs found in these areas give quite good echoes for both surface radar and A/S; ranges up to 3,000 and 1,000 yards respectively having been obtained.

Just before dark, night cruising disposition was taken up, with TF.75 10 miles ahead of TG.77.4, and TF.74 the same distance on the starboard flank. The night was dark and still, the moonless sky partially overcast, the light west wind brought occasional rain squalls across the smooth sea. Visibility was between three and four thousand yards. A strong, favourable surface drift necessitated reducing speed through the water to six knots. An officer in *Arunta* recalled of the passage:

Below decks the ship is like a Turkish bath. . . . We hear the pipe, "Hands will clean into battle-dress at 1600, and go to second degree at 1900." . . . We change into long trousers and long-sleeved shirts; and don lifebelts and anti-flash gear which covers our head and face from the flash of bursting bombs or shells. At 7 p.m. we close up to our action stations. . . . Everybody—except the men on watch—tries to make himself comfortable near his action station. It means lying on the steel deck, and it nearly always rains, making it difficult to rest. The few who have a sheltered position with the ship closed up, find it too hot for comfort. . . . An uncanny silence prevails as the ships, with their convoy of landing craft, proceed towards their objective.<sup>5</sup>

Radar established accurate navigational positions as Biak and its accompanying islets were approached. At 2.15 a.m. both task forces moved ahead of TG.77.4. TF.74 turned to the southward to pass between Padai-dori Island and the east end of Biak, astern of TF.75 and about two miles ahead of TG.77.4, and in this order the armada continued to the south-westward. At 4.35 *Mullany* and *Ammen* broke off from TF.74 for their bombarding area. *Arunta* and *Warramunga* led the two cruisers to the southward between Auki and Owi Islands, and thence westward between Owi and Rurbas Islands. From about 5 a.m. several lights were seen intermittently on Biak near Bosnek and Mokmer, but there was no indication that the ships were sighted. After clearing Owi Island, the cruisers turned north-west and at 6.30 a.m., as morning broke fine and clear over a flat, calm sea, the ships of the two forces in their respective fire support areas began scheduled fire on their assigned targets.

The *Arunta* writer recalled:

A target on a point of land has been assigned to *Arunta*. From a distance it appears only as a clump of trees. The spotting officer can be heard mumbling into his phones, and the gun crews are tense as the weapons of destruction swing round noiselessly. The fire gongs are sounded. Suddenly there is a deafening roar and a blinding flash as the guns fire. Seconds later the shells burst on the target.

The Australian ships carried out their bombardments without opposition, but *Hutchins* and *Bache* of TF.75 were fired on by a shore battery, and both suffered hits and casualties. U.S.S. *Phoenix* placed two salvos "accurately" on the enemy battery, "and no further firing from this emplacement

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<sup>5</sup> Paymaster-Lt D. C. Phillips, RANVR, "Action Stations off Biak Island", *H.M.A.S. Mk. III* (1944), p. 94.

was observed. Plane spotter firing reported one gun appeared to have been put out of commission and that all personnel had evacuated battery.”<sup>6</sup>

From the time the first naval shells landed in the target area the beach was obscured by smoke and dust, which was carried seaward in a heavy cloud by a light off-shore breeze. This had an effect on the landings which could have caused serious confusion. When the first wave of landing craft crossed the line of departure on its way to the beach, the heavy bombardment clouds reduced visibility to about 500 yards. However, the wave reached the beach at 7.19 a.m., four minutes after the scheduled time of landing and landed successfully against light opposition, though the inner control officer reported that the landing point was poor with steep-to backing, and no sign of the jetties. This led to the discovery that by the time the L.S.T's in their correct position off the landing beach had discharged their landing craft, the entire formation had drifted to the westward in a very strong westerly set, estimated at two to three knots, for which insufficient allowance had been made. The jetties were located by a destroyer, about a mile to the eastward. By this time four waves had gone in to the initial landing point, and the decision was made to make the balance of the landings on the correct beaches, since the jetties offered the only chance of unloading the L.S.T's. The control boat accordingly moved off to the eastward, and landings were resumed there. While the landing plan was disrupted by the initial error, the landing force quickly adjusted itself to the situation. The two jetties were found to be of excellent construction, and during the day three L.S.T's were beached at the west jetty and one at the east, as soon as the L.C.I's were clear. The four remaining L.S.T's discharged in the stream into L.C.T's and landing vehicles and craft. By 5 p.m., when the L.C.T's departed, between 80 and 90 per cent of the eight L.S.T. loads had been discharged, an amount which exceeded expectations. The L.S.T. echelon departed at 6 p.m. and returned to Humboldt Bay.

Throughout 27th May intermittent naval bombardments were carried out as necessary, and Allied air attacks were made on Mokmer aerodrome area and other targets. It was in one of these attacks that TF.74 came closest to being hit during the day, when a Liberator bomber of the first wave of the attack on Mokmer airfield, crossing close astern of the task force at 11 a.m., inadvertently dropped a bomb which fell about 800 yards from *Shropshire* and 1,000 yards from *Warramunga*. At 4.55 p.m. the two task forces were released by Fechteler from bombardment duties, and TF.74, plus *Nashville* and *Abner Read* from TF.75, proceeded east through Japen Strait and retired to Humboldt Bay to replenish, and reached there next morning. TF.75 remained as covering force off Biak, where it was relieved by TF.74 on the morning of 31st May.

When, at 6.30 a.m. on 31st May, TF.74 took over covering patrol from TF.75, *Shropshire* was on her way to Australia. She had developed

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<sup>6</sup> Report by C.O. *Phoenix*, dated 29 May 1944.



engine trouble and had one shaft inoperative before the Biak landing, and since her speed was thereby limited to 24 knots, it was decided to send her to Sydney with four weeks' availability for repair and refit. She sailed from Humboldt Bay at noon on 28th May. Her place in TF.74 was taken by *Nashville* and destroyer *Abner Read* was added to the task force.

In planning the covering operations for Biak, Commander Seventh Fleet considered it unlikely that Japanese surface forces would attempt to interfere during daylight, but that enemy air attack was a likely threat. The covering forces were therefore directed to operate during daylight west of the longitude of Wakde and within 150 miles of that island. This would mean that the naval forces on cover patrol in daylight could reach westward as far as the eastern end of Biak, but remain within the practical limit of shore-based fighter cover. Japanese surface interference was possible at night. It was considered that an approach would most likely be north or south of Noemfoor Island (if from Halmahera) and thence into Japen Strait; or from north or north-west of the Schouten Islands. Warning of the approach of enemy surface forces would, if from the north (Palau), likely be from submarines watching that base; if from the west, from Catalina aircraft on long-range air searches from Wakde. It would be necessary for the naval covering force at night to be in an area where it had sea room for freedom of manoeuvre, and whence it could be moved into an intercepting position when warned of the approach of the enemy. For these reasons it was decided that by night the covering forces would operate in an area embracing the eastern half of Biak Island and the Padaido Islands, extending some 45 miles north of Biak and about the same distance east, and extending on its southern extremity westward into Japen Strait to the western end of Japen Island, 20 miles south-west of Biak's south-western bulge.

On the day TF.74 relieved TF.75 on cover patrol, Crutchley recorded that reconnaissance submarines off Tawitawi reported movement eastwards of Japanese main naval units from that fleet base, "but there was no indication that these moves portended any enemy naval intervention in the Biak area". TF.74 accordingly maintained patrol in the respective day and night areas. On 1st June Crutchley was told by Kinkaid of the possibility of the Japanese attempting to reinforce Biak by landings at Wardo (south-west coast) or Korim Bay (north-east coast). Since the three guard destroyers of TF.77 supporting the American land forces were in a position to watch Wardo, Crutchley kept watch on Korim Bay during the night sweeps. There were no incidents. Next afternoon, as TF.74 was making for Biak to reach the night covering position, orders were received from Kinkaid recalling it to Humboldt Bay.

On Biak, 31st May and 1st June were relatively quiet. The American land forces were moving into positions to launch attacks. An Intelligence report indicated that the Japanese were ferrying carrier-type aircraft to within striking distance of Biak. On 2nd June the eight L.S.T's of Echelon H4 arrived and discharged on the beach. At 4.35 p.m. a formation of

15 aircraft was seen over Biak through clouds, and these began bombing and strafing the L.S.T's on the beach. From then on, for an hour, some 50 or more aircraft, many of them fighters and dive bombers, attacked the L.S.T's and other targets. An intense volume of anti-aircraft fire from both shore and ship batteries took heavy toll of the attackers. Very little damage was suffered—the L.S.T. echelon sailed as soon as it could be formed up during the attack—and “at least seven planes were seen to crash in flames, and there were probably others that were not observed. No friendly fighters were in the area during the attack, a report having been received that they were grounded by weather.”<sup>7</sup> These heavy air attacks were continued on subsequent days, and were directed particularly against ships at Biak, with concentration on the three guard destroyers of TF.76, which were giving fire support to the land forces.

From 1st June onwards, Allied Intelligence, including air and submarine sightings, revealed considerable Japanese surface naval activity in the vicinity of Tawitawi, Davao and Halmahera, with indications of strong forces heading in the general direction of Biak. It was this which underlay the recall of TF.74 to Humboldt Bay where, to meet the threat of surface attack, Task Forces 74 and 75 were combined into one force with Crutchley as Officer in Tactical Command, and Comdesron 24 (Captain K. M. McManes, USN, in Desdiv 47) as Commander Destroyers. Kin-kaid's orders were for the Combined Force to arrive in position 00 degrees 40 minutes South, 136 degrees 25 minutes East—20 miles due north of the easternmost point of Biak—“at about 7.15 p.m. 4th June and thereafter”. The force was to intercept and destroy equal or inferior enemy forces attempting to reinforce Biak; to retire towards Hollandia if superior forces were met; to retire towards Hollandia during daylight if no enemy forces were met, and repeat the operation nightly.

This apparent intention of the Japanese to attempt to reinforce Biak was a reversal of the army decision of 9th May that the defence line had been pulled back to Sorong and Halmahera, and that Biak was to be defended to the last man. The American naval historian suggests that the reason was that 27th May, the date of the Allied landing on Biak, happened to be the 39th anniversary of Tshushima—Japan's “Trafalgar”—and “when the Allies did land on Biak 27 May, the Japanese Navy reacted so promptly to defend it as to suggest that the fortuitous connection with the Tshushima anniversary compelled it to insist on change of plan”.<sup>8</sup> The navy's first action was to strengthen the *23rd Air Flotilla* by 166 aircraft—118 of them fighters. These were quickly in evidence in the heavy air attacks on Biak Island referred to above. Meanwhile an operation designated KON was hurriedly planned. It was to transport 2,500 troops of the *2nd Amphibious Brigade* from Mindanao to Biak in warships. Rear-Admiral Sakonju (who had led the last surface raid into the Indian Ocean)

<sup>7</sup> Capture and occupation of Bosnek Area, Biak Island. Report by Commander Special Service Unit (CTU.77.4.6)—Captain Bern Anderson, USN—dated 12 June 1944.

<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol VIII, p. 118.

was in command in *Aoba*, with light cruiser *Kinu*, destroyers *Shikinami*, *Uranami*, and *Shigure* to lift the troops; and battleship *Fuso*, heavy cruisers *Myoko* and *Haguro*, and five destroyers as screen.

The destroyers embarked 1,700 troops at Zamboanga, on Mindanao's western extremity, on 31st May. With *Aoba*, *Myoko*, *Haguro*, and three more destroyers, they sailed from Davao just before midnight on 2nd June. Another force consisting of minelayers *Itsukushima* and *Tsugaru*, with an L.S.T. and subchaser escort, left Zamboanga with 800 troops. These 800 were landed at Sorong on 4th June. The other operation was cancelled when Sakonju's force was sighted and reported by an American submarine, and then shadowed by an Allied aircraft, on the morning of 3rd June. That evening Admiral Toyoda suspended the operation and the ships returned to Davao.

#### IV

While, on 3rd June, the Japanese admiral was making up his mind to call off this first essay of KON, Crutchley, Berkey, and all commanding officers of ships of the two task forces met on board *Australia* in Humboldt Bay, and Crutchley explained the tactical operation the assignment entailed. "I also consulted with CTU.73.1.2"—a task group of land-based and tender-based air, Seventh Fleet—"regarding Tom Cat cooperation at night." It was arranged that three Catalinas (Tom Cats) of TU.73.1.2 would cooperate with the Combined Task Force in the Biak area, two to carry out sector searches for enemy surface vessels, one to operate directly with the Task Force, normally maintaining a close reconnaissance on a 20-mile circle, but available to Crutchley for any special search as ordered.<sup>9</sup>

The Combined Task Force—*Australia* (Flag), *Phoenix*, *Nashville*, *Boise*, American destroyers *Abner Read*, *Mullany*, *Ammen*, *Hutchins*, *Daly*, *Beale*, *Bache*, *Trathen*<sup>1</sup> and Australian destroyers *Arunta* and *Warramunga*—sailed from Humboldt Bay at 11.45 p.m. 3rd June. At 5.40 p.m. next day, when north-east of Cape Warari, the east end of Biak, enemy aircraft, earlier detected by radar, were sighted into the sun. The force was in cruising disposition to meet air attack and proceeding at 20 knots. Three or four dive bombers at once started a shallow dive-bombing attack. Speed was increased to 25 knots and an emergency turn of 100 degrees was made to starboard. One of the aircraft scored a near-miss on *Nashville*, the explosion making a ten-foot hole on the waterline on the starboard quarter; but the ship reported she could still make 19 knots. Two other aircraft near-missed *Phoenix*, causing superficial damage. No other ships were damaged.

The force reached its assigned position north of Cape Warari about 7 p.m., and then turned south towards the cape. Crutchley had been told by Kinkaid that a Japanese attempt to land troops might be made at Wardo. He accordingly decided to pass south about Biak to its western

<sup>9</sup> Catalinas operated in two capacities—"Black Cats" carrying out routine reconnaissance of enemy-held territory, but also reporting anything seen on passage to and from; "Tom Cats" carrying out special reconnaissance missions, as this with the Combined Task Force.

<sup>1</sup> *Trathen*, US destroyer (1943), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

end, the American land forces on the island were duly warned, and the three fire support destroyers of TF.76 were ordered to clear Crutchley's passage south of the island. About this time a radio report was received that reconnaissance aircraft had seen a Japanese task force to the northward and westward of Manokwari, but "there was no later confirmation of this report and its origin is vague".<sup>2</sup> This could have been the minelayers and L.S.T. with the 800 troops making for Sorong.

On Biak, the movements of the Combined Task Force were followed with interest. Captain Anderson recorded in his report:

The night of 4-5 June was a bright moonlight night with little cloud. The *Reid* [one of the three fire support destroyers] was in Condition One all night in view of the possibility of enemy attack. Shortly after dark, radar plot and intercepted voice manoeuvring signals indicated that TF.74 was entering the channel between Bosnek and Owi Island and passing through to the westward. CTF.74 was advised that the shore batteries were alerted for surface vessels and the shore positions notified by voice radio that the cruisers were passing through. This word did not get thoroughly disseminated ashore, and when the cruiser force first appeared there was considerable apprehension until the ships' silhouettes were recognised. TF.74 made a sweep up the western side of Biak and returned through the same passage shortly after midnight.

Enemy aircraft were about that night, and as TF.74 was in the restricted waters between Owi and Biak on the return passage, the force "strung out with Desdiv 48 ahead, followed by cruisers in column and Desdiv 47, *Arunta* and *Warramunga* prolonging the line", as Crutchley later reported, aircraft attacked with torpedoes about 1.15 a.m. on 5th June, "in bright moonlight and without flares". No ships were damaged, "but three torpedoes certainly crossed our line and exploded on the bottom or on the shore".

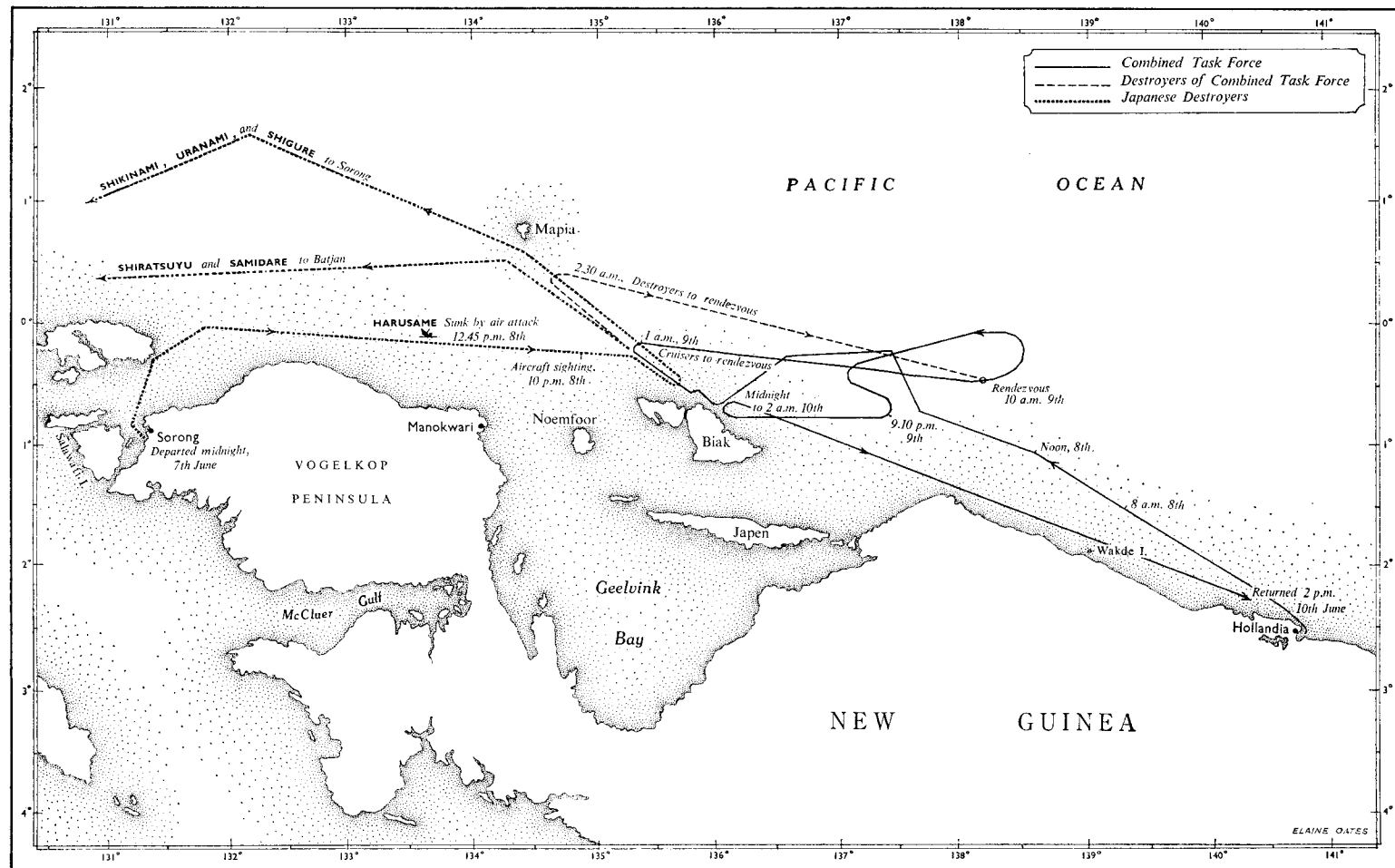
Throughout the day and night of 5th June the Combined Task Force patrolled in the respective day and night areas, and on 6th June, in accordance with orders from Kinkaid, returned to Humboldt Bay to fuel. On the 5th the force was reinforced with four destroyers of Desdiv 42—Commander A. E. Jarrell, U.S.N., in *Fletcher*,<sup>3</sup> with *Radford*, *Jenkins*, and *La Valette*—bringing its destroyer strength up to 14.

At 11.30 p.m. on 7th June the destroyer-augmented force, now less *Nashville*, left behind because of her injury, sailed from Humboldt Bay to resume its mission of denying reinforcements to the Japanese. In the afternoon of 8th June, when the force was north of Biak, a report was received that Allied bombers had attacked an enemy force of two cruisers and four destroyers about 90 miles north-west of Manokwari and steering east. It was claimed that the enemy turned and retired to the north-west after one destroyer had been sunk and others damaged.

This report was partly right. The enemy force sighted was one making a second attempt to reinforce Biak, using the troops which had been

<sup>2</sup> Capture and occupation of Bosnek Area, Biak Island. Report by CTU.77.4.6, Captain Bern Anderson.

<sup>3</sup> *Fletcher*, US destroyer (1942), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.



Battle for Biak, 7th-10th June 1944

landed at Sorong. Three destroyers, *Shikinami*, *Uranami* and *Shigure*, each of which towed one large landing barge, with Rear-Admiral Sakonju flying his flag in *Shikinami*, left Sorong with the troops just before midnight on 7th June escorted by destroyers *Harusame*,<sup>4</sup> *Shiratsuyu* and *Samidare*. Cruisers *Aoba* and *Kinu*, as covering force, stood by at Salawati Island, just off the western end of the Vogelkop. Sakonju's force was attacked just before 1 p.m. on 8th June by ten B-25 Mitchell bombers from Lake Sentani, with fighter escort. *Harusame* was sunk, and three other destroyers damaged. But the force did not then retire. At 7 p.m. Sakonju received an aircraft report of the sighting of the Combined Task Force steaming west at high speed.

Actually that sighting was at 2.40 p.m., when Crutchley was about 100 miles east of Biak. The aircraft, which shadowed him for about half an hour, was seen from the ships, and as soon as it was out of sight Crutchley made an evasive turn to the north for an hour or so, resuming his westward course at 4.15. At 8 p.m. he steered directly for Korim, where it was considered a landing attempt would be made, and arrived off the bay at 10 p.m. The moon, two days after full, rose at 8.23, but the sky was overcast with passing showers. Approaching Korim Bay several aircraft contacts appeared on the radar screen and speed was reduced to 15 knots to minimise wakes. There was no surface contact off Korim so Crutchley turned to the north-west to sweep parallel to the coast, and detached *Mullany* to take a closer look into Korim Bay with radar. Soon after 10 p.m. a Liberator night search plane (33B) reported Sakonju's force about 60 miles north-west by west of Crutchley, making towards him at 12 knots.

All this time the Combined Force was talking among itself with TBS (Talk Between Ships radio), and the conversation<sup>5</sup> in the jargon used tells the story from 9.50 p.m. when Crutchley ordered the course alteration to sweep north-westward parallel to the coast:

9.50 Crutchley to Force: "Stand by. Execute. Out." 9.52—Crutchley to *Mullany*: "Break off and look into the cupboard with your jeep. Do not show yourself more than necessary and then rejoin. Keep floodlights on." [This last referred to identifying radar signal.] 10 p.m.—*Australia* to all: "Bogey 295 degrees 13 miles" . . . 10.1 "My last report course south-east; now 280 degrees 10 miles" . . . 10.2 "275 degrees five miles. Out." 10.3—Crutchley to Force: "Execute to follow. Speed 20." 10.4—*Australia*: "Bogey now 258 degrees eight miles." . . . 10.5 "Bearing 246 10 miles. Faded." 10.7—*Radford* to Crutchley: "We have that bogey, 240 degrees 11 miles." . . . 10.8 "That bogey about 12,000 yards on the port beam. Changed course sharply west, and is now headed about 120 degrees." 10.9—Crutchley to *Radford*: "If you get a chance, knock him down." 10.10—Crutchley to *Mullany*: "Rejoin." 10.12—*Boise* to Crutchley: "We have tracked that bogey for some time and believe it is a friendly Black Cat with weak lights." 10.13—Comdesdiv 42 [Jarrell] to Crutchley: "He's going to pass right over *Mullany*." 10.16—*Australia*: "Bogey 134 degrees nine miles." . . . 10.18: "Correct my last report to bearing 190 degrees." 10.19—Crutchley

<sup>4</sup> *Harusame*, Japanese destroyer (1937), 1,368 tons, five 5-in guns, eight 24-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts. Sunk off NW New Guinea 8 Jun 1944.

<sup>5</sup> Extract from TBS Log, HMAS *Australia*, from 2134K 8 June to 0120K 9 June 1944.

to Force: "Execute speed 20." . . . 10.20—"Execute to follow turn 020. Stand by. Execute." 10.22—Berkey to Crutchley: "Did you intercept report from plane 33B on recco?" 10.23—Crutchley to Berkey: "Yes. We have that message." 10.24—*Radford* to Crutchley: "We have at least four bogies bearing 180. Ten miles." 10.28—*Mullany* to Crutchley: "He dropped his load on us and missed us by about 50 to 100 yards."

A miss was as good as a mile in this instance. *Mullany* suffered neither damage nor casualties, and in the meantime Crutchley applied himself to the reported sighting by aircraft 33B. The position of the ships as given was 26 miles north-west of Supiori Island—adjoining Biak on the west—and less than 60 miles W.N.W. of Crutchley, who ordered course west, 20 knots. "This course would intercept the enemy if their speed was actually 25 knots and not 12 knots as reported by the aircraft. If no interception was made on this course I intended to turn and search back towards the position where the enemy had been reported, confident that he could not have slipped by to the southward."<sup>6</sup>

In planning the conduct of the operation, Crutchley had taken various tactical considerations into account. The area was one in which Japanese aircraft operated freely at night; the moon was near full; he could anticipate Tom Cat warning of the approach of surface ships, their numbers, but not certainty of their types. Experience showed that in night actions against the Japanese, with forces approaching swiftly end on, there was the chance, even with radar warning, of getting into torpedo range unintentionally, and the Japanese had been quick to exploit this. Deployment must therefore be well outside the intended engagement range. The full moon reduced the likelihood of achieving a surprise destroyer attack so that, if their torpedo attack was to be pressed home, heavy ships must be in a position to engage enemy heavy ships during the latter part of the destroyers' run in to attack.

For these reasons Crutchley decided<sup>7</sup> to keep the force in anti-aircraft formation until the enemy was detected; to be certain of deploying in time, even if this entailed reversing course; to follow the destroyers sufficiently closely to be able to engage with gunfire during the latter part of their run in.

In deployment (a manoeuvre which the task force had frequently practised by day and by night in training periods at Milne Bay) he intended that the 14 destroyers would form four divisions, Desdiv 47, Desdiv 48, Desdiv 42, and a fourth division of *Arunta* and *Warramunga*. The stations of Desdivs 47 and 48 on deployment would be determined by the basic rule: the divisions on the side of the axis towards the direction of deployment would become the Van force; that on the side of the axis away from the direction of deployment would become the Rear force. Desdiv 42 would form a third division with station ordered by Crutchley; and *Arunta* and *Warramunga* would support the attack of Van or Rear division as he

<sup>6</sup> CTF.74—Report of Proceedings, Friday, 2nd June, Monday, 12th June 1944.

<sup>7</sup> CTF.74—Report of Proceedings, Friday, 2nd June.

ordered. This was all clearly explained and discussed at the meeting in *Australia* in Humboldt Bay on 3rd June, so that all commanding officers in the force were prepared for whatever eventuated as a result of the 33B report and Crutchley's response to it.

For some minutes after the receipt of the aircraft report and the turn towards the position it gave, the force sped over the sea with the interchange of TBS messages dealing mainly with bogies. But at 11.19½ p.m. *Boise* came out with the awaited report: "Surface gadgets 290 distance 26,000." Thirty seconds later, Jarrell, in *Fletcher*, reported: "We have surface gadgets 293 distance 21,000." One minute later, at 11.21, Crutchley ordered: "Speed 15. Stand by. Execute"; and "Prepare deploy 000 degrees." Cruisers were ordered to form column. Desdiv 42 was ordered to take position three miles on the port quarter of the cruisers. And at 11.24 Crutchley ordered: "Deploy 000. Execute all." Deployment made Desdivs 47 and 48 Van and Rear divisions respectively, and *Arunta* and *Warramunga* were ordered to support the Van.

Jarrell made the customary reply "Wilco" to Crutchley's order to take station on his port quarter, but he was nearest to the enemy and at once made for the Japanese. As Crutchley remarked in his report:

I consider that Comdesdiv 42 used his initiative at the earliest possible moment. His division was already formed and it gave me great satisfaction only very few minutes after contact had been made, to hear on TBS that he was going for the enemy at 30 knots.

At 11.25 p.m. Jarrell reported that the target was breaking up into two groups, and at 11.29 that he suspected that the Japanese had fired torpedoes, a suspicion engendered by his observation of their turning northerly. Two minutes later Crutchley ordered all destroyers to chase and attack. Desdiv 42 was in the lead. McManes, with Desdiv 47—*Hutchins, Daly, Beale* and *Bache*—was some 3,000 yards to the eastward, with Desdiv 48—*Abner Read, Ammen, Mullany* and *Trathen*—about 3,000 yards astern. The two Australian destroyers were coming up from astern of the cruisers, which were working up to 25 knots. At first all had gone according to Crutchley's plan:

The destroyers were moving out and the cruisers about to deploy when the range of the enemy from my flagship was 21,500 yards and I had every hope of bringing a simultaneous blow to bear. From that moment, the enemy turned and fled at 32 knots and all that could be done was a stern chase by the two most advanced divisions of our destroyers. It was a bitter disappointment.

At 11.34 the enemy, whose numbers and types were still unknown, appeared to be in two columns, 2,000 to 3,000 yards apart, steering about north-west at 32 knots. The destroyers of the Combined Task Force, working up to maximum speed, were hauling ahead of the cruisers which were steering N.W. by N. at 28 knots. At 11.39 Jarrell, replying to a TBS request from Crutchley, said the enemy appeared to be of four ships "making about 30 knots. Course 310. Appears to be all destroyers." Two minutes later his earlier suspicion that the Japanese had fired torpedoes



was confirmed when *Boise* reported: "Torpedo just crossed my stern." The expected course of enemy torpedoes was east, and Crutchley turned the cruisers to west and successfully combed the wakes.

Jarrell was hauling well ahead, and at 11.42 told Crutchley: "Before I get out of TBS range, these ships are making about 32 knots. I don't know whether I can catch them, but will try." At 11.43 the destroyers passed several barges which had been cast off by the Japanese ships, and fired on them as they sped by. Gradually, as the minutes wore on and their speed built up to maximum, the leading Allied destroyers lessened the gap between them and the Japanese. By now they were making 35 knots, six more than the cruisers, which were at their warm water maximum speed of 29. At 11.51 *Boise* reported the enemy bearing N.W. by W. 31,800 yards, at which time Jarrell had pulled the Japanese back to within 20,000 yards, soon to be reduced to 18,400, of Desdiv 42. At this time Crutchley told Jarrell on TBS: "Keep me advised of bearing and distance from you," and Jarrell replied: "Bearing 298, range 20,000 yards." From then on for the next hour, during which period, because of the lengthening gap between him and Crutchley there had to be considerable relaying of TBS messages, Jarrell's reports told the story of the long stern chase:

11.52, bearing 298, 20,000 yards; 11.58, bearing 296, 18,300; 0.4 a.m. 9th June, bearing 297, 17,800; 0.12 a.m., bearing 296, 17,500.

With bearing unchanged, the ranges continued to close: 0.16 a.m. 17,000; 0.20 a.m. 16,700; 0.34 a.m. 16,100; 0.42 a.m. 15,650; 0.49 a.m. 15,300. The Japanese throughout this period steered north-west at 32 knots.

This gradual overhauling of the enemy by the destroyers contrasted with the gradual falling back of the cruisers, as shown by the radar reports of *Phoenix* and *Boise*, whose radar models held contact after it had been lost by *Australia*:

At 11.51 p.m., the enemy was bearing 298 degrees at a range of 31,800; at 0.3 a.m. on the 9th bearing was 306 and range had increased to 34,500; and at 0.33 a.m. bearing was 310 and range 38,600 yards.

During the hour Jarrell outlined above, *Fletcher* opened fire, and there was intermittent exchange of fire between Desdiv 42 and the rear Japanese ships. TBS talk continued between the Allied destroyers and cruisers:

0.8 a.m., 9th June—Jarrell to all others: "Enemy number five in all, three in left column, two in right." . . . 0.12 a.m.—Comdesron 24 (McManes) to Jarrell: "Does the range decrease?" Jarrell: "Very slowly. 296 degrees, 17,000 yards. In another 500 yards *Fletcher* will fire salvos and hope to make him zigzag." At 0.16 a.m. Jarrell reported: "Range now 17,000," and two minutes later: "That is *Fletcher* firing bow guns. My course 302." At 0.19 a.m. McManes asked: "What do you think about this? Do you think you can catch him?" and Jarrell replied: "I think so. We will try to fire and make him zigzag." At 0.22 Crutchley joined in to ask McManes: "Are your division and Division 42 the most advanced?" There was some difficulty in getting this message through to McManes, and *Daly*, in Desdiv 47, replied: "42 is about 17,000 yards, 47 about 7,000 yards behind him." Two minutes later Crutchley asked Jarrell if he was sure there was nothing heavier than destroyers in the force, and got the reply: "All ships appear the same size. I am reasonably sure but not positive there is nothing heavier than destroyers."

By 0.45 a.m. it seemed to Crutchley fairly certain that the Japanese destroyers had no escort or covering force in the area, and it was no use urging the cruisers along at full speed in a losing chase. Since Desdivs 42 and 47—eight ships to the five Japanese—were the most advanced in the pursuit, he decided to let them continue the chase until 2.30 a.m. when, if the Japanese held to their course, they should have reached the vicinity of Mapia. He would himself break off the chase with the cruisers, Desdiv 48, and *Arunta* and *Warramunga*. Accordingly, at 0.48 a.m. he instructed McManes and Jarrell by TBS: "Chase with your divisions until 0230 or earlier at your discretion. Then retire high speed rendezvous at 10 a.m. latitude 0 degrees 30 minutes South longitude 138 degrees 20 minutes East." Since this continued chase by the destroyers would take them outside the area of Allied bombing restrictions, a warning message was passed to all aircraft and authorities that friendly forces were chasing enemy destroyers to the westward of the bombing line. At 1 a.m. Crutchley turned east with the cruisers, the two Australian destroyers, and Desdiv 48, and reduced speed to 15 knots so as to be handily placed should McManes or Jarrell get into difficulties. And he detached *Arunta* and *Warramunga* to search back over the enemy route and deal with any barges cut adrift by the Japanese destroyers. This search was disappointing. Only one barge was found and was sunk by *Arunta*. The two ships then examined the north-east coast of Biak close inshore from Wafordori Bay to Korim, after which they proceeded to rejoin the main force at the rendezvous set for 10 a.m.

For an hour and a half after the cruisers broke off the chase the eight destroyers of Desdivs 42 and 47 pursued the enemy. At 1.25 Jarrell, who had been exchanging intermittent fire with the Japanese, assuming that Sakonju did not know of the presence of Desdiv 47, turned his column to port to unmask the batteries of all ships, and opened simultaneous fire in the hope that the heavy volume might cause the Japanese to turn to starboard, thus giving McManes a chance to get into the fight. The northern Japanese column of two destroyers did turn about four points to starboard; McManes was thus enabled to close range to about 15,000 yards, and he opened fire at 2.5 a.m. Six minutes later an explosion was seen on *Shiratsuyu*, the only ship on either side to be hit in the action. She was in the left-hand column and dropped back about 1,000 yards, but soon picked up speed.

During their retirement the Japanese destroyers made much use of smoke, and fired from behind it with fair accuracy in range, but not for line. In the action the American destroyers fired a total of 2,005 rounds—Desdiv 42 fired 631 rounds of 5-inch, and Desdiv 48 fired 1,374. At 2.35 a.m., when the Japanese destroyers were 30 miles south-east of Mapia, and holding their own for speed, the Americans, having reached Crutchley's time limit, broke off the chase and made for the rendezvous at 31 knots. As was subsequently learned, *Shiratsuyu* suffered a direct hit during the action, and *Shikinami* and *Samidare* were both slightly damaged

by near misses. No American ship was damaged. As the American naval historian said:

A few soldiers may have landed at Korim Bay from barges cast off by the Japanese destroyers, but most of the troops were taken back to Sorong. *Shiratsuyu* and *Samidare* of the screening unit went direct to Batjan [in the Moluccas, about 240 miles due west of Sorong on the Vogelkop's western extremity], where they joined cruisers *Myoko* and *Haguro*. *Shikinami*, *Uranami*, and *Shigure* returned to Sorong, disembarked troops, and joined cruisers *Aoba* and *Kinu* at Salawati, after which all ships went to Batjan, arriving 10 June.<sup>8</sup>

The various groups of the Combined Force kept the appointment with Crutchley at 10 a.m. on 9th June, and the force re-formed in cruising disposition, operating during the day in an area about 100 miles north-east of Biak, towards which Crutchley shaped course, intending to be in the vicinity of Korim Bay from about 10 p.m. But at 7.30 a message from Kinkaid ordered the force back to Humboldt Bay. Course was shaped accordingly. Soon, however, an aircraft report of surface ships heading south-east, in a position suggesting that they were bound for Biak for another attempted reinforcement, led to the force delaying its return to Humboldt Bay, where it eventually arrived at 2 p.m. on the 10th, while it covered Korim Bay during the period any reinforcement would be attempted.

The combined force returned to Humboldt Bay almost on the eve of Admiral Crutchley hauling down his flag as Rear-Admiral Commanding the Australian Squadron and Commander Task Force 74. He had assumed his appointment on 13th June 1942, so that its two-year span was nearly run. Just eight weeks after he first hoisted his flag in *Canberra* on 13th June 1942, he was Officer in Tactical Command of a combined force of Australian and American cruisers and destroyers at Guadalcanal, when the Battle of Savo Island was fought. Now, within less than a week of his relinquishing his appointment, he again was Officer in Tactical Command of a combined force of Australian and American cruisers and destroyers, in circumstances with points of similarity to those of two years previously.

On both occasions American land forces had barely established an insecure foothold on an island where they were dependent on sea communications for both protection and supplies; a Japanese base was not far distant; Japanese air power was a factor to be considered; a Japanese surface force of unknown strength and composition was reported approaching, and an attempt to land reinforcements and a bombardment of shore positions were possibilities as, for the combined force, was a night action. But there the similarity ended. Before Guadalcanal there had been little opportunity for the heterogeneous to achieve homogeneity. In the intervening months much had been achieved through joint training, mutual experience, and prolonged operations under war conditions. This combined force of June 1944 was one in which the commander and his lieutenants

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<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol VIII, p. 130.

knew alike the plan of operation and the others' minds; and were better equipped in the vital communications channel, both psychologically and technically. As a force it was effectively combined, and was homogeneous to a degree in no way reached at Savo Island. The resultant confidence and practised efficiency were illustrated in the conduct of this action of 8th-9th June 1944.

One thing suggested that the Japanese had made technical advances in the interim. In his report, Crutchley commented on the withdrawal by Sakonju when his range from *Australia* was 21,500 yards:

It was a bitter disappointment. Why did the enemy turn then? It was overcast at the time and there had been no visual sighting between surface forces. I am convinced that the enemy now has a surface warning radar nearly as good as ours. Some say that the enemy was apprised of our presence by a report from the aircraft which attacked *Mullany* at about 2200. I discount this possibility, for, had that report been made immediately, surely the enemy would have turned around earlier.

About the time that the Combined Force reached Humboldt Bay a Japanese force comprising the two giant battleships *Yamato* and *Musashi*, light cruiser *Noshiro* and six destroyers, under the command of Vice-Admiral Ugaki in *Yamato*, sailed from Tawitawi for Batjan, where it arrived next day and added its considerable weight to Sakonju's force. For Ozawa was eager to achieve the reinforcement of Biak and the retention of the island, and to this Toyoda had agreed, and had detached the battle-ship group from the *Mobile Fleet*. It was intended that a powerful force<sup>9</sup> should ensure reinforcement of Biak and at the same time inflict a destructive bombardment on the Allied positions on that island and on Owi. But these Japanese movements coincided with large-scale American ones. From Pearl Harbour, from Guadalcanal, from the Marshall Islands, staging at Eniwetok and Kwajalein, a total of 535 combatant ships and auxiliaries were carrying four and a half reinforced divisions—127,571 troops—to the next American assault target, the Marianas. Ugaki was to have left Batjan for the reinforcement and bombardment of Biak on 15th June. Before then, on the 11th and 12th, Pacific Fleet aircraft from the 15 carriers of Task Force 58 which left Majuro in the Marshalls on 6th June, delivered heavy attacks on Guam and Saipan. It was evident to the Japanese that the Marianas were next on the American list; and that the day of the great naval battle was approaching. On 12th June Toyoda issued orders to start operation A-GO at once. Operation KON was "temporarily" suspended—for all time. Ugaki, with his battleships and cruisers, hastened north to meet Ozawa in the Philippine Sea.

The order to implement A-GO sealed the fate of the Japanese forces on Biak. They fought to the end, and for nearly a month denied the airfields to the invaders; not until 22nd June did the first Allied fighters operate from

<sup>9</sup> It consisted of Ugaki's Attack Division—*Yamato*, *Musashi*, *Myoko*, *Haguro*, *Noshiro*, and destroyers *Shimakaze*, *Okinami*, *Asagumo*; and Sakonju's Transport Unit: *Aoba*, *Kinu*, and destroyers *Shikinami*, *Uranami*, *Yamagumo*, *Nowaki*; and Transport Unit 2: *Itsukushima*, *Tsugaru*, a transport, and a number of subchasers and cargo ships.

Mokmer. The capture of the island cost Allied ground forces 438 killed or missing, and 2,361 wounded. Naval casualties were 22 killed, 14 missing, and 68 wounded.

## V

By the end of June the southern spearhead of the dual Allied advance towards the Philippines had reached almost to the "head" of New Guinea. It was a penetration of just over 1,000 miles in the eighteen months from the time that the seaborne force of the 2/9th Battalion A.I.F. was carried from the island's "tail" at Milne Bay in *Colac*, *Ballarat* and *Broome* on the first step of the long and arduous journey. But along the haft of the spear there remained much work for the R.A.N. corvettes and other naval forces auxiliary to Task Force 74. Indeed, the parallel earlier remarked upon between the New Guinea campaign and that of North Africa in 1941 continued, and markedly. As Tobruk remained a British fortress when the Axis advance had flowed around and invested it, so the *XVIII Japanese Army* remained, overrun and bypassed by the Allied advance. Some 400 miles to the rear of the Allied spearhead at Biak Island

the isolated but resolute *XVIII Japanese Army* had made a determined counter-attack, just as the *XVII Army* had done on Bougainville. In May the 32nd American Division had been concentrated at Aitape where it formed a perimeter about nine miles wide by two deep round the Tadij airfield. Patrols moved east as far as Babiang, 25 miles from Aitape, and in that area from 7th May onwards there were clashes with strong parties of Japanese. The divisional commander, Major-General Gill, decided to maintain a forward position on the Dandriwad River, but the Japanese pressed on and forced a withdrawal to the Driniumor, about 12 miles from the perimeter.<sup>1</sup>

There was, however, an important difference between the situation of the *XVIII Japanese Army* in New Guinea in 1944 and that of the Australians at Tobruk in 1941. These last mentioned were sustained by the seaborne men and supplies carried to them by the ships of the old 10th Destroyer Flotilla. The Japanese in New Guinea had no such sustenance, for here, as in the Mediterranean in 1941, the Allies had command of sea communications. And, in one instance, that of *Vendetta*, a ship which had helped to support the Australians at Tobruk now performed a similar service along the north New Guinea coast. Of the Australian smaller ships, she, the two frigates *Gascoyne* and *Barcoo*,<sup>2</sup> some 27 corvettes,<sup>3</sup> and a number of motor launches, were employed at this period in escorting, patrolling, and, in some instances, supporting the army ashore with bombardments. Once again sea power was manifested as a vital factor, and the work of the small ships as an important expression of its use.

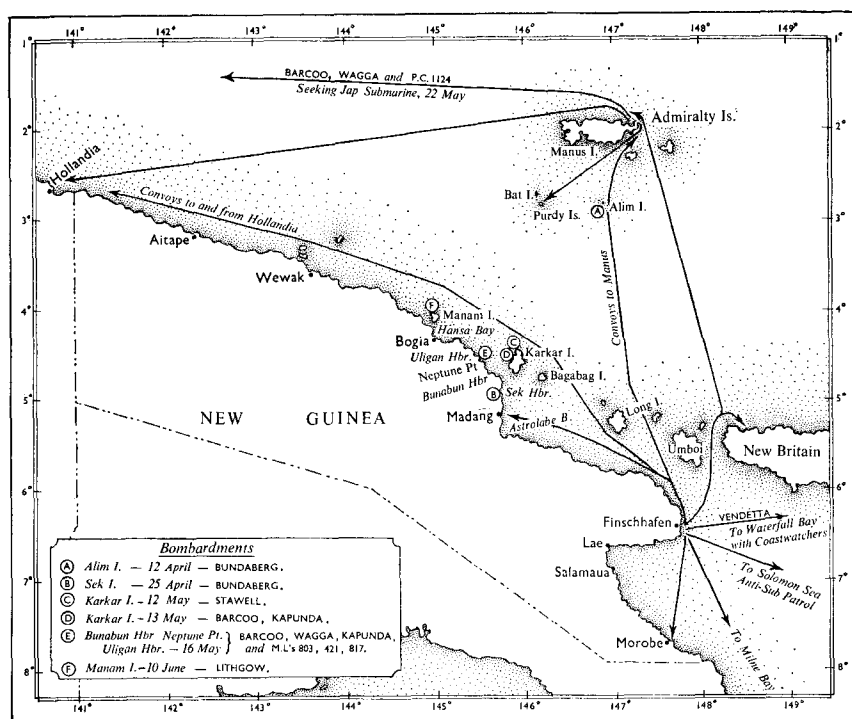
In the early hours of 24th April 1944 four L.C.M.'s and a tender, carrying the headquarters and one company of the 30th Battalion, left

<sup>1</sup> Dexter, *The New Guinea Offensives*, p. 806.

<sup>2</sup> HMAS *Barcoo*, frigate (1944), 1,477 tons, two 4-in guns, 20 kts.

<sup>3</sup> Corvettes working in the area during the period April-June 1944 were: *Ararat*, *Benalla*, *Bendigo*, *Bowen*, *Broome*, *Bunbury*, *Bundaberg*, *Castlemaine*, *Colac*, *Cowra*, *Deloraine*, *Geelong*, *Gladstone*, *Glennelg*, *Goulburn*, *Gympie*, *Kapunda*, *Katoomba*, *Kiama*, *Lithgow*, *Rockhampton*, *Shepparton*, *Stawell*, *Strahan*, *Townsville*, *Wagga*, and *Whyalla*.

Bogadjim, in Astrolabe Bay. At 9.30 a.m. they landed at Ort, five miles south of Madang, their numbers by now being swelled by a patrol from the 57th/60th Battalion, which they had picked up off the mouth of the Gogol River. From Ort, these representatives of two of the Australian brigades which had cleared the Japanese from the Huon Peninsula advanced on Madang by road, and the 57th/60th patrol and a platoon of the 30th "entered a deserted Madang at 4.20 p.m. on 24th April. At 5.30 eight



Small ships on northern New Guinea Coast, 1944

L.C.M's nosed into the harbour to land Brigadier Cameron<sup>4</sup> and the vanguard of the 8th Brigade."<sup>5</sup>

Four and a half hours later, and some 160 miles to the south-eastward, H.M.A.S. *Vendetta* (Lieut-Commander Mesley), which had arrived in the area on 13th April, was just leaving Langemak for Bogadjim. She had on board 214 A.I.F. and 140 of the Papuan Infantry Battalion, and reached her destination at 7 a.m. on the 25th, there to be told that "the battalion had moved on to Bili Bili". At Bili Bili, Mesley learned that the

<sup>4</sup> Brig C. E. Cameron, MC, ED. Comd 8 Bde 1940-44, 2 Bde 1944. Accountant; of Turramurra, NSW; b. Balmain, NSW, 13 Sep 1894.

<sup>5</sup> Dexter, p. 787.

battalion "had moved on to Modilon Plantation, one mile south of Madang". He accordingly took *Vendetta* to Madang, and after sending the whaler ashore to investigate the position, disembarked his troops into the 30th Battalion's four L.C.M's, and reported by signal to N.O.I.C. Langemak. In his subsequent report, Mesley wrote:

The Intelligence available at Langemak was very much out of date, and the first information that Madang was in Allied hands was given by H.M.A.S. *Vendetta*'s signal. This actually caused some consternation and it was firmly believed that the troops carried by H.M.A.S. *Vendetta* had actually taken Madang. This belief was later corrected.

Within the ten days from 24th April to 3rd May *Vendetta*, in a series of six passages, carried from Langemak to Madang a total of 1,937 troops and 95 tons of supplies, thus upholding the reputation she established in the "Tobruk Ferry Service" three years earlier, when her total of 39 individual passages—20 into Tobruk and 19 out, carrying a total of 4,483 troops and 616 tons of supplies—constituted a ship record.

On her second visit with troops to Madang, on 27th April, *Vendetta* found *Bundaberg* (Lieut-Commander Pixley) there. *Bundaberg* arrived in the New Guinea area at the end of March 1944. On 10th April she left Langemak as Senior Officer Escort with H.M.A. Ships *Kapunda* (Lieutenant Callow<sup>6</sup>) and *Stawell*<sup>7</sup> (Lieutenant Griffith) escorting Convoy NA1—the American ships *James D. Doty* (7,176 tons) and *Matthew Thornton* (7,181 tons)—the first convoy to the Admiralty Islands. On the return passage to Langemak, *Bundaberg* on 12th April passed close to Alim Island, 45 miles south of Manus, and Pixley recorded in his Letter of Proceedings that "since Japanese stragglers were reported to be still in most islands in the vicinity I made a short bombardment of Alim Island and gave part of it a good plastering".

On 25th April *Bundaberg* sailed from Langemak under orders from N.O.I.C. New Guinea (Captain Armstrong<sup>8</sup>) "to help in the Madang area". She reached Madang at 9 a.m. on the 26th and embarked the commander of the 8th Brigade, Brigadier Cameron, and an infantry detachment, and proceeded to Sek Island, where Japanese had fired on an Australian unit approaching Alexishafen a few hours earlier. At 3.40 p.m. *Bundaberg* opened fire on Sek Island with her 4-inch gun, and then closed to about half a mile and opened fire with oerlikons along the southern half of the island. At 3.55 p.m. she landed the troops "and a small detachment of men from my ship's company", and after shelling and destroying a gun position on the northern end of the island, entered Sek Harbour at 4.43 p.m. "The small A.I.F. unit we contacted there," Pixley recorded,

<sup>6</sup> Lt-Cdr C. M. Callow; RANVR. Served RN 1940-43; comd HMAS's *Kapunda* 1944, *Cairns* 1945-46. Of Sydney; b. Forbes, NSW, 12 Feb 1905.

<sup>7</sup> HMAS *Stawell*, corvette (1943), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>8</sup> Cmdre J. M. Armstrong, CBE, DSO; RAN. HMAS *Australia* 1918, 1939-42; comd HMAS *Manoora* 1942; NOIC New Guinea Area 1943-44; comd HMAS *Australia* 1944-45. B. Sydney, 5 Jan 1900.

was very relieved to see us, as they had only just entered Alexishafen a short time before. I returned to Madang that evening and we provided the garrison of about 100 officers and men with hot meals and much needed bread.

On 12th May *Bundaberg*, after a period boiler cleaning in Milne Bay, left there with *Gympie* (Lieut-Commander R. Rowsell, R.N.Z.V.R.) and *Gladstone* (Lieutenant Penney<sup>9</sup>) to inaugurate the Solomon Sea anti-submarine patrol.

On 17th January 1944, the R.A.N.'s second frigate, H.M.A.S. *Barcoo*, commissioned at Cockatoo Island under the command of Lieut-Commander Travis.<sup>1</sup> After trials and working up period she proceeded to the New Guinea area. She arrived at Milne Bay on 15th March, and there met her older sister *Gascoyne* (Lieut-Commander Donovan). *Barcoo* made her initial visit to Langemak on 6th April, where she arrived escorting the American submarine *Cero*.<sup>2</sup> There followed a period of patrolling and escorting, including, on 6th May, an appointment south of China Strait with the American transport *Matsonia* (17,226 tons), which that ship failed to keep.<sup>3</sup> On 12th May *Barcoo* arrived at Madang, where it was decided that, in company with *Kapunda*, she should carry out a night anti-submarine patrol on each side of Karkar Island and at dawn bombard Karkar and, later, Bunabun harbour on the mainland opposite the island. The two ships met at 6 a.m. on 13th May north of the island after their night patrols and, Travis subsequently reported:

Proceeded down the west coast about 3,000 yards off shore, firing at buildings, huts, and an occasional bridge. There was no sign of any opposition fire and at 0745 both ships proceeded to Bunabun harbour and repeated the performance there, again without any sign of Japanese being in the vicinity.

Three days later, on 16th May, *Barcoo* and *Kapunda* repeated their bombardments of targets on the mainland adjacent to Karkar Island. On this occasion they were accompanied by *Wagga* (Lieutenant Guille) and *ML803* (Lieutenant Smith<sup>4</sup>), *ML421*, and *ML817* (Lieutenant Doyle). From 5.45 a.m. until 8.10 a.m. the ships bombarded the coast at Uligan harbour, Neptune Point, and Bunabun harbour. Travis recorded:

I am inclined to think it unlikely that there were many Japanese about the areas, but have no doubt that the bombardment acted as a very fine tonic for the ship's companies concerned, as did the subsequent mentions in the press.

There was a number of Australian Fairmile motor launches based on Madang at this time, and *Vendetta* records playing supplier of food and water there in May to *ML816*, *ML806*, *ML424* and *ML413*. *ML806*

<sup>9</sup> Lt J. W. Penney; RANR. HMAS's *Swan* 1940-42, *Adelaide* 1942-43; comd HMAS *Gladstone* 1943-45. Ship's master; of Sydney; b. Nottingham, England, 6 Mar 1904.

<sup>1</sup> Cdr A. J. Travis; RAN. Comd HMAS's *Swan* 1940-42, *Barcoo* 1944, *Pirie* 1944-45, *Geraldton*, and SO 22 MSF, 1945. B. Beechworth, Vic, 17 Jan 1905. Died 8 Jun 1967.

<sup>2</sup> *Cero*, US submarine (1943), 1,526 tons, one 3- to 5-in gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 20 kts.

<sup>3</sup> A subsequent failure of *Matsonia* to keep an appointment affected TF.74's operational program, as will be told later.

<sup>4</sup> Lt L. K. Smith; RANVR. Served RN 1940-43; comd *ML803* 1943-44, *ML811* 1944-45. Of Melbourne; b. Fremantle, WA, 25 Oct 1901.



(Lieutenant Long<sup>5</sup>) carried a distinguished passenger for a while when, at the beginning of June, she took the noted English author and musician, Dr Thomas Wood, from Madang to Hansa Bay. Long recalled how

Dr Wood arrived on board, wearing, I think, a safari jacket, shorts, and stockings, and a digger's hat. He was accompanied by Mr Malcolm Uren, a West Australian pressman. We sailed from Madang, and from the very first, and all throughout the journey, Thomas Wood showed the keenest interest in everything. He was up on the bridge, on the deck, for'd, aft, down in the wardroom, up on the bridge again. He was all over the ship, hopping about like a bird, and his eye missed nothing. How he did it, I don't know.

Dr Wood himself recorded of his trip:

We sailed one day in an ML, a handy little vessel, painted olive-green and manned by a crew of young men stripped to the waist and as brown as berries. The one thing that mattered to them was their job and the right way to do it.<sup>6</sup>

*Barcoo's* bombardment of Bunabun harbour on 16th May was a preliminary to the Australian Army's occupation of that area, and on the 28th of the month Brigadier Cameron again availed himself of the navy's mobility. At 6.45 a.m. on that date the corvettes *Goulburn* (Lieut-Commander Collins<sup>7</sup>) and *Gympie* sailed from Madang for Alexishafen, where they arrived at 8 a.m. Here Brigadier Cameron and a staff officer boarded *Goulburn*, and the two ships sailed for Bunabun, to learn on arrival that the 35th Battalion had established a perimeter round the harbour. By 7 p.m. the two ships were back in Alexishafen.

The small ships kept pace with the 35th Battalion in its advance, and on 9th June *Deloraine* (Lieutenant Williams<sup>8</sup>), *Lithgow* (Lieutenant Haultain<sup>9</sup>) and two L.C.M.'s embarked at Uligan harbour three companies of the battalion under the command of Lieut-Colonel Rae,<sup>1</sup> and in company with *Goulburn*, Senior Officer, ferried them to Dugumur Bay, twenty miles along the coast, where they set up headquarters. Here Collins, *Goulburn's* commanding officer, went ashore and learned from the local Angau representative that there were possibly Japanese on Manam Island, off Hansa Bay, and it was decided to bombard the island at the first opportunity. This was done on the morning of 10th June, when *Goulburn*, *Deloraine*, and *Lithgow* were on patrol from the island to the Sepik River. There was no return fire, and when, two days later, *Goulburn* and *Lithgow* returned to the island and put a small landing party of P.I.B. ashore at Wesr Bay, they learned from the inhabitants that the Japanese had left

<sup>5</sup> Lt A. Long, RANVR. Served RN 1940-42; comd HMAS *Nambucca* 1942-43; HMAS *Bunbury* 1943-44; comd *ML806* 1944 and 1945. Of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 17 Jun 1910.

<sup>6</sup> Lloyd Rhys, *My Ship Is So Small* (1946), pp. 92-3.

<sup>7</sup> Lt-Cdr J. N. Collins, RD; RANR. Comd HMAS *Tolga* 1941-42; HMAS *Adelaide* 1942-43; comd HMAS *Goulburn* 1943-45. Merchant seaman; b. 8 Jan 1909. Died 10 Oct 1954.

<sup>8</sup> Lt-Cdr W. J. Williams, RANR. HMAS's *Australia*, *Bathurst* and *Gympie*; comd HMAS *Deloraine* 1944. Of Windsor, Vic; b. 17 Jul 1916.

<sup>9</sup> Lt C. T. G. Haultain, RANR. RAAF 1939-42 (No. 12 Sqn, and CO Marine School, Rathmines); comd HMAS *Lithgow* 1943-44, *Karina* 1944-45, *Anaconda* 1945. Merchant service officer; of Ingleburn, NSW; b. Calcutta, India, 17 May 1896.

<sup>1</sup> Lt-Col D. F. Rae, MC. BM 8 Bde 1940-41; CO 35 Bn 1942-44. Woolbroker; of Pymble, NSW; b. Sydney, 21 Oct 1894.

Manam "three moons ago". Commenting on the Manam-Sepik patrol in his report, Haultain, *Lithgow's* commanding officer, remarked that the patrol, "in conjunction with the small assistance rendered to the A.I.F. at Uligan and Dugumur, gave the ship's company an opportunity to get some idea of cooperation with the army".

Patrols, escorting convoys, and occasional bombardments, were not the only missions. At Langemak on 23rd June *Vendetta* embarked "one A.I.B. lieutenant, one sergeant and one coder", and sailed for Waterfall Bay, New Britain. She arrived off the bay at dawn on the 24th, and soon after a canoe with one A.I.B. officer and two natives, "the recognition signal", was sighted, *Vendetta* entered the bay and anchored off Cutarp Plantation, landed her passengers and embarked three A.I.B. officers<sup>2</sup> and 53 natives in their place. She was back in Langemak at 8.20 p.m. that same day and Mesley recorded that the pre-arranged air cover from Kiriwina was much in evidence, which was "most comforting, as Waterfall Bay is within 80 miles of Rabaul where 60 enemy aircraft have been reported". An indication of the traffic now using the route along the north coast of New Guinea is in *Vendetta's* report of her next mission when, two days after returning from Waterfall Bay she sailed as Senior Officer escort to a convoy of twenty large ships to Hollandia. Other ships of the escort force were *Stawell*, *Bunbury*, *Broome*, *Kiama*,<sup>3</sup> *Gladstone*, *SC749*, *PC1131*, and *PC1121*.<sup>4</sup>

## VI

Meanwhile the ships of TF.74 and their companions of the spearhead continued to thrust westward. In the afternoon of Monday, 12th June 1944, combined TF.74 and TF.75, under the command of Rear-Admiral Crutchley, arrived at Seeadler Harbour after the action with the Japanese destroyers off Biak. The occasion marked the end of Crutchley's term as rear-admiral commanding the Australian Squadron and, for a while, with the hauling down of his flag, the absence of the title "RACAS" from the Service records. Next day, Tuesday, 13th June 1944, was an historic date in the annals of the R.A.N. For the first time a graduate of the Royal Australian Naval College commanded the squadron, and it was recorded in the Report of Proceedings covering period 13th June 1944 to 10th July 1944: "Tuesday, 13th June. At 0800 Commodore J. A. Collins, C.B., R.A.N., assumed command of Task Force 74 in succession to Rear-Admiral V. A. Crutchley, V.C., D.S.C., R.N."

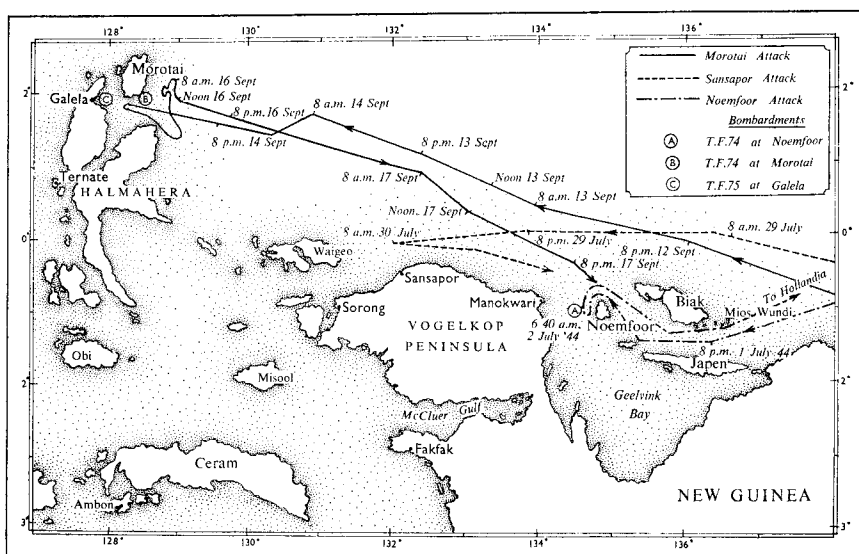
The report of the period covered the first operation carried out by the Task Force under the command of Collins—the pre-landing bombardment at the assault on Noemfoor Island. Almost circular, about eleven miles

<sup>2</sup> They were all AIB army officers. Those withdrawn by *Vendetta* were Lt C. K. Johnson, Capt C. D. Bates and Capt W. M. English of Capt Fairfax-Ross' force—New Britain's south coast AIB group. The officer landed was Lt J. C. Sampson. See Gavin Long, *The Final Campaigns* (1963), pp. 244-5.

<sup>3</sup> HMAS's *Bunbury* and *Kiama*, corvettes (1943-44), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>4</sup> *SC749*, *PC1131* and *PC1121*, US submarine chasers (1942-44); *SC749*, 95 tons, one 40-mm gun, 20 kts; *PC1131* and *PC1121*, 280 tons, one or two 3-in guns, 18 kts.

in diameter, rising from a reef-encircled coral base in jungle-covered hills up to 700 feet, Noemfoor lies about midway between Biak and the east coast of the Vogelkop. Its desirability to the Allies lay in its three airfields, which the Japanese completed by mid-1944. In Allied hands they would provide outlying airfields for Biak, and were well situated for future operations on the Vogelkop. On 14th June MacArthur directed that plans be prepared to seize the island on 30th June, a date subsequently postponed to 2nd July. The landing force, "Cyclone Task Force", was of 7,100 troops, the American 168th Regiment reinforced by artillery, anti-aircraft, tank, engineer and service units. The landing was planned to take place at Kamiri, on the north-west of the island, and since this was the centre of Japanese power there, it was decided to subject it to a heavy pre-landing bombardment by ships of TF.74 and TF.75, with CTF.75, Rear-Admiral Berkey, in tactical command.



Noemfoor, Sansapor and Morotai, July to September 1944

For most of June TF.74, less *Shropshire*, which was undergoing repairs in Sydney, was in Seadler Harbour. The combined task forces, comprising three cruisers and ten destroyers including H.M.A. Ships *Australia*, *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, sailed from Seadler at 1 p.m. on 24th June. The approach to Noemfoor was made south of Biak through Japen Strait. The Naval Attack Force, TF.77, of L.C.M's and L.C.T's, mounted at Finschhafen and Tum and they and Berkey's bombardment force joined in the final stages of the approach to the objective. From 7 p.m. on 1st July, when the combined TF.74-75 was entering Japen Strait, they came under

the operational control of TF.77, Admiral Fechteler, and proceeded westward and then north-west, to be 10 miles ahead of the Attack Force by midnight, and to sweep ahead of it to Noemfoor. An overcast sky and passing showers favoured the attackers, and though enemy aircraft were frequently on *Australia*'s radar screen between 8 p.m. and 11.30 p.m., they seemed, Collins noted, "to devote their attentions to Biak Island, whence A.A. fire was several times observed. No attack developed on our task group or on the main body and it seems unlikely that our groups proceeding towards Noemfoor were detected by these enemy aircraft."

At 4.30 a.m. on Sunday, 2nd July, when about eight miles north of Noemfoor Island, the two task forces proceeded independently. TF.74 formed with *Arunta*, *Warramunga*, and U.S. Ships *Mullany* and *Ammen* screening *Australia*, and stood to the southward to their bombarding positions, and scheduled bombardments were carried out before the landing. In these *Australia* fired 288 rounds of 8-inch, *Arunta* and *Warramunga* respectively 545 and 493 rounds of 4.7-inch, and *Mullany* 515 rounds of 5-inch and 992 rounds of 40-mm. There was no return fire, and Collins observed that "the assigned target areas had been well covered". The naval bombardment at Noemfoor was most effective. The U.S. naval historian records that "Japanese encountered around the airfield [Kamiri] were so stunned from the effects of the bombardment that all the fight was taken out of them; even those in near-by caves were dazed and offered little resistance".<sup>5</sup> Even so, it was 31st August before the land operations terminated. By then, Cyclone Task Force had lost 66 killed or missing and 343 wounded. It had accounted for 1,900 Japanese, including 186 captured. Task Force 74's participation in the operation ended with the bombardment. At 11.15 a.m. on 2nd July, both task forces were released by Admiral Fechteler, formed cruising formation north of Noemfoor, and shaped course through Japen Strait to Hollandia, where they arrived at 8.30 a.m. on the 3rd.

## VII

June 1944 was a month of great movements on the great waters. It was remarked above that at the beginning of the month the Americans initiated a parallel spear thrust to that which secured Biak when, on the 6th, the 15 aircraft carriers of Vice-Admiral Marc A. Mitscher's TF.58 left Majuro to deliver the pre-assault air attacks on Saipan and Guam. That in turn caused Admiral Toyoda to implement A-go, and the opening movements of the Japanese main force to counter the Americans. And also on the 6th, as the American ships left the Marshalls, away on the other side of the world fleets of ships of Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay's<sup>6</sup> assault force were steaming across the English Channel in "the greatest amphibious

<sup>5</sup> Morison, Vol VIII, p. 138.

<sup>6</sup> Adm Sir Bertram Ramsay, KCB, KBE, MVO. Vice-Adm Dover, 1939-42; Flag Offr comdgd Combined Ops Mediterranean 1943; Allied Naval C-in-C, Expeditionary Force 1943-44. B. 20 Jan 1883. Killed in aircraft accident 2 Jan 1945.

operation in history" to open operation NEPTUNE, the attack in the invasion of Normandy.<sup>7</sup>

Taking part in this operation were 1,213 warships—including battle-ships, cruisers, destroyers, frigates, corvettes, minesweepers and smaller craft; 2,490 landing ships and craft for the assault, and 1,656 for ferry services. The actual assault on Normandy started at midnight on 5th June, and between then and 5 a.m. on the 6th, 1,056 British heavy bombers dropped over 5,000 tons of bombs on German coastal batteries and communications. Then, soon after daylight, 1,630 American heavy bombers attacked the German fortifications. Just before the arrival of the assault waves the beach defences were attacked by fighter bombers and medium bombers; and soon after 5.30 a.m. "along the whole fifty-mile front the warships' guns opened up with what was up to that time the heaviest rain of shells ever to be poured on land targets from the sea".<sup>8</sup>

The landings at Normandy started at 7.30 a.m. on the 6th, and by nightfall 132,715 Allied soldiers had been landed from the sea. Over-all statistics of stores, guns and vehicles unloaded on D-day are not available, but the British records show that over 6,000 vehicles (including 900 tanks and armoured vehicles, 240 field guns, 80 light anti-aircraft guns and 280 anti-tank guns) as well as 4,300 tons of stores and ammunition had been landed by the British Eastern Task Force. By the end of 18th June—four years to the day since the then British Commander-in-Chief, General Alan Brooke, had left St Nazaire in the British trawler *Cambridgeshire* when the French Government surrendered to the German invaders—the Allies had landed 629,061 troops, 95,000 vehicles, and 218,000 tons of supplies<sup>9</sup> on the Normandy beaches. On 5th July, 29 days after the first assault, the millionth Allied soldier stepped ashore in France.

The preponderance of combatant ships in the assault phase of operation NEPTUNE was British.

The escort vessels (in all 286 destroyers, sloops, frigates, corvettes and trawlers) were to be provided by stripping the other naval commands to the bare minimum. Though the great majority came from the Royal and United States Navies, and especially from the former, the Canadian Navy was also represented, there were a few Dutch ships, and French, Greek, Polish and Norwegian crews manned others. The proportion of combatant ships, excluding landing ships and craft and auxiliary

<sup>7</sup> On the last day of May, the Naval Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, issued a special order of the day to each officer and man in the Allied Naval Expeditionary Force. It said: "It is to be our privilege to take part in the greatest amphibious operation in history—a necessary preliminary to the opening of the Western Front in Europe which in conjunction with the great Russian advance will crush the fighting power of Germany. . . . Our task, in conjunction with the Merchant Navies of the United Nations, and supported by the Allied Air Forces, is to carry the Allied Expeditionary Force to the Continent, to establish it there in a secure bridgehead, and to build it up and maintain it at a rate which will outmatch that of the enemy."

<sup>8</sup> Roskill, *The War At Sea*, Vol III, Part II, p. 43. The weight of this bombardment was soon to be exceeded at Guam in the Marianas. There in July, 13 days of continuous bombardment preceded the landings. During this bombardment, "not only the most systematically conducted naval bombardment to date, it was the most prolonged of the war; longer than those on Leyte, Iwo Jima, or Okinawa", battleships expended 6,258 rounds of 16-inch and 14-inch ammunition; the heavy and light cruisers 3,862 rounds of 8-inch and 2,430 of 6-inch respectively; and all ships, including the destroyers, 16,214 rounds of 5-inch. (Morison, Vol VIII, p. 379.)

<sup>9</sup> Figures for the American and British beaches were almost identical. American, 314,514 troops, 41,000 vehicles, 116,000 tons of supplies; British: 314,547 troops, 54,000 vehicles, 102,000 tons of supplies. (Morison, *The Invasion of France and Germany* (1957), p. 176, Vol XI in the series.)

vessels, finally provided by the chief participants in NEPTUNE was British and Canadian 79 per cent, American 16½ per cent, and other nations 4½ per cent.<sup>1</sup>

The Royal Australian Navy was not represented at the Normandy landing by any ships, but was there in the persons of a number of officers (mainly R.A.N.V.R.) and men. In June 1944, R.A.N.V.R. officers serving with the Royal Navy held the following commands: one destroyer, one frigate, two corvettes, one submarine, one fleet minesweeper and four flotillas of tank landing craft. An additional number commanded motor torpedo boats, motor gunboats, and other small craft at the invasion. H.M.S. *Ajax*, one of the bombarding cruisers at Longues, in the British sector, had three R.A.N.V.R. officers on board—one as officer of quarters of a 6-inch gun turret, one in charge of high-angle armament, and one as action officer of the watch—and Australians were also at the invasion in the complements of H.M. Ships *Enterprise*, *Glasgow*, *Scylla*,<sup>2</sup> *Ashanti*, *Eskimo*,<sup>3</sup> and *Mackay*,<sup>4</sup> among others.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile much had happened in the Middle Sea since, in July 1943, the eight Australian corvettes of the 21st and 22nd Minesweeping Flotillas took part in the invasion of Sicily. The Allied capture of that island was complete by the beginning of September 1943, and on the 3rd of that month the British Eighth Army crossed the Strait of Messina and entered mainland Italy. Six days later some 700 large and small warships, merchant ships, and landing craft, formed the naval assault force for an Allied landing at Salerno.

The assault forces sailed from Tripoli, Bizerta, and Oran and Algiers. The Salerno assault was against heavy opposition, and violent reaction by the Germans in the form of a tank attack aimed at the weakly-held junction of the British X Corps (northern) attack area and the American VI Corps (southern) attack area, four days after the initial landing. The enemy drove so deep a salient between the Allies that they brought the American beaches under artillery fire and for some time the situation was precarious. The most dangerous thrust was, however, halted on 14th September, and the salient began to shrink. In this redemption the naval bombardments, together with those from the air, played a considerable part. The German naval command's war diary states that on 15th September "our attack had to stop and re-form because of the great effect of the enemy sea bombardment and continuous air attacks".<sup>6</sup> The port of Salerno was under shell fire until 25th September, so could not be used until then, but as the German army withdrew, slowly to the north, the Allies were able to occupy and open small ports on the southern shore

<sup>1</sup> Roskill, *The War At Sea*, Vol III, Part II, p. 17. Of the 2,470 landing ships and craft of various types in the assault phase of NEPTUNE, 1,588 were manned by the British and Commonwealth Navies.

<sup>2</sup> HMS *Scylla*, cruiser (1941), 5,450 tons, ten 5.25-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

<sup>3</sup> HMS's *Ashanti* and *Eskimo*, destroyers (1938), 1,870 tons, eight 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torpedo tubes, 36½ kts.

<sup>4</sup> HMS *Mackay*, destroyer (1919), 1,530 tons, five 4.7-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 31 kts.

<sup>5</sup> From information obtained at the Admiralty in June 1944 by Lt-Cdr J. A. Blaikie, RANR. See "The R.A.N.V.R. at the Invasion", *H.M.A.S. Mk. III*, pp. 16-22.

<sup>6</sup> Roskill, *The War At Sea*, Vol III, Part I (1960), p. 180.

of the Bay of Naples. British troops entered Naples on 1st October. The port had been thoroughly wrecked, but restoration was so rapid that by 18th October more than 5,000 tons of cargo were being discharged there daily.

With the announcement of the Italian armistice on 8th September, the Germans withdrew their forces from Sardinia, and some 25,000 troops, 2,300 vehicles and 5,000 tons of supplies were successfully ferried across the Strait of Bonifacio to Corsica, and Sardinia fell to the Allies with hardly a shot being fired. In Corsica a curious situation developed, with the Free French (destroyers *Le Fantasque* and *Le Terrible*,<sup>7</sup> cruisers *Jeanne d'Arc*<sup>8</sup> and *Montcalm*, and submarines and torpedo boats) landing troops and supplies on the south end of the island while the Germans withdrew their forces from the northern end. By 3rd October, when they completed this operation, they had withdrawn close on 30,000 troops with their arms and equipment: 6,240 by sea and 21,107 by air lift. Most were taken to the Italian mainland at Leghorn, but some were landed on Elba.

Meanwhile the Mediterranean Fleet gained the use of all important naval bases in the south of Italy. Taranto was seized on 9th September; Brindisi and Bari were occupied on the 11th; and on the night of 2nd-3rd October 1943, commandos were landed near Termoli on the east coast, and linked up with infantry coming overland from the south. After heavy fighting, Termoli was captured on the 6th. In conjunction with the capture of Naples, this put the whole of southern Italy in Allied hands.

On 2nd October 1943 the Allied line bisected the "leg" of Italy just below the calf, running north-east from the mouth of the Volturno River to Termoli. Crossing Italy almost parallel with the Allied line, 30 or so miles to the north-west and running from the Garigliano River to the Sangro River, the German "Gustav Line" now presented a serious obstacle and for a while slowed to a standstill the hitherto swift Allied advance. The immediate prize, Rome, lay some 70 miles behind the Gustav Line. Frontal attacks by the Allies during November and December made little headway, and by the end of 1943 it was clear that the main assaults had failed. It had earlier been intended to help the frontal assault with a flank assault by a force from the sea on the west at Anzio, about 30 miles south of Rome, and to make this assault, which was dependent for its timing on the availability of shipping, on 20th December. Two days before then, however, since it was clear that the main assaults had failed, the flank assault was cancelled, only to be revived in an enlarged form.

On 25th December the British Prime Minister, temporarily "in Carthage Ruins" on his way home after the Cairo Conference, cabled to the British Chiefs of Staff urging that the Anzio assault be carried out with two divisions "about January 20". The object would be to strike round the German flank and open the way for a rapid advance on Rome. The main

<sup>7</sup> *Le Terrible*, French destroyer (1933), 2,569 tons, five 5.5-in guns, nine 21.7-in torpedo tubes, 37 kts.

<sup>8</sup> *Jeanne d'Arc*, French cruiser (1931), 6,496 tons, eight 6.1-in guns, two 21.7-in torpedo tubes, 25 kts.

factor was the provision of landing craft. Of the 104 L.S.T's then in the Mediterranean, 68 were due to leave by the middle of June for the United Kingdom in preparation for the Normandy landings, then scheduled for May. Fifteen, which had been taken from Mountbatten with the cancellation of *BUCCANEER* early in December, were on their way across the Indian Ocean, and could bring the remaining Mediterranean strength up to 51; but this was short of the 88 counted as necessary for the transport of two divisions. In the event, after much discussion and proposals, the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington agreed to the departure from the Mediterranean of 56 of the Normandy L.S.T's being delayed to permit of their use at the Anzio landing.<sup>9</sup>

The Anzio convoys, carrying some 50,000 men and 5,000 vehicles of the landing force formed up outside the Bay of Naples on 21st January, and steered for their destination. At least one of the L.S.T's delayed from its Normandy appointment for the landing was under Australian command. It had already taken part in the Sicily and Salerno assaults, and its company were later to find the Normandy landings their "tamest" amphibious operation by comparison. The first landings were made at 2 a.m. on 22nd January and achieved complete surprise. Anzio port was captured by 8 a.m., and the first L.S.T. entered at 5 p.m. By midnight on the 22nd, 36,034 men, 3,069 vehicles, and large quantities of stores were on shore. By the 29th of the month these figures had been increased to 68,886 men and 27,250 tons of stores, despite heavy gales and high seas which had seriously retarded unloading.

There followed a period in which weather and heavy enemy counter-attacks took toll of the naval forces and supply fleets, while the stern German defence and determined counter-attacks forced a long and hard battle both on the main Allied forces fighting up from the south, and the flank attack forces. Before the end came, the two divisions originally considered sufficient for the Anzio operation had expanded to seven—five American and two British; and by the end of May more than half a million tons of stores had been landed. The difficulties of supplying and maintaining the Anzio bridgehead—towards which maintenance the cruisers and destroyers contributed materially by bombardment as required—were increased during April and May by the progressive withdrawal of ships for the impending Normandy assaults. May saw an improvement in the military situation. On the 18th Monte Cassino, the great obstacle on the main front to the advance on Rome, fell to the Allies. A week later the Anzio forces joined up with those of the Fifth Army, and by the end of the month the Alban Hills, 15 miles from Rome, were in Allied hands and VI Corps from Anzio had advanced beyond the range of Allied naval supporting fire. The main task of the navy at Anzio was thus completed. Rome fell on 4th June.

After the capture of Rome the Fifth American and Eighth British Armies advanced swiftly towards the next German defences, the Gothic

<sup>9</sup> Churchill, Vol V, pp. 378-91.



Line, which crossed Italy above the River Arno, from just north of Pisa on the west to Pesaro on the Adriatic. In the fortnight after the fall of Rome they pressed forward 100 miles, and by the end of June were about halfway to the Gothic Line.

Meanwhile, on 17th June, Elba was assaulted by an Allied force in which the principal military contribution was by a French colonial infantry division of about 9,500 men, carried from Corsica in British and American landing craft, escorted and supported by coastal craft, gunboats, and support vessels supplied by the same two countries' navies. Rear-Admiral Troubridge,<sup>1</sup> who commanded the northern (British) assault at Anzio, was in command of the naval forces. The assault, in order to achieve surprise, was carried out without preliminary air bombing or heavy naval bombardment. As a result there was stiff fighting with relatively heavy casualties among the attacking ground troops, but all organised resistance ended on the 19th. Because of the terrain, the invaders had prepared in advance for the carriage inland of ammunition, and Admiral Troubridge commented in his report: "An interesting feature was the return of the mule to combined operations. Tracks and wheels require a beach with exits, but a mule can scramble almost as well as a man."

Now had to be determined the nature of the next Allied moves in the European war. At the QUADRANT Conference at Quebec, in August 1943, the idea was born of the ANVIL project, an invasion of southern France in conjunction with the Normandy landings. General Eisenhower, then Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean, was requested to prepare an appreciation and outline plan, and did so on 27th October. It was cautious and not entirely favourable. A threat to or assault on southern France might prejudice instead of help the Normandy operation by leading the Germans to reinforce France generally instead of diverting strength from northern France. He proposed that the Combined Chiefs of Staff should approve preparations for alternatives: if, by the time it was desired to implement ANVIL, the Allies had progressed so far in Italy as to have gained the Lombardy plain, then to make the attack on southern France; if not, to stage only a threat to that area. The Combined Chiefs of Staff, on 12th November, approved Eisenhower's report as a base for further planning. On the last day of November, at Teheran (where Stalin had evinced great interest in ANVIL) it was the unanimous recommendation of the Combined Chiefs of Staff:

... that we will launch Overlord [Normandy] in May, in conjunction with a supporting operation against the south of France on the largest scale that is permitted by the landing-craft available at that time.

A few days later, at Cairo, the Combined Chiefs of Staff directed Eisenhower, in consultation with C.O.S.S.A.C. (Lieut-General Morgan,<sup>2</sup> Chief

<sup>1</sup> Vice-Admiral Sir Thomas Troubridge, KCB, DSO; RN. Served Atlantic, East Indies and Mediterranean theatres; 5th Sea Lord (Air) 1945-46. B. 1 Feb 1895. Died 29 Sep 1949.

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Gen Sir Frederick Morgan, KCB. Comd 1st Support Gp, 1 Arm'd Div 1939-40; BGS II Corps 1940-41; comd 55 Div 1941-42, I Corps 1942-43; Chief of Staff to Supreme Allied Comd designate 1943-44; Deputy Chief of Staff to Supreme Comd Allied Expeditionary Force 1944-45. Regular soldier; b. 5 Feb 1894.

of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander designate), to submit an outline plan for ANVIL on the assumption that he would be given the assault shipping and craft for a lift of at least two divisions.

Planning proceeded during December and January, but two factors now militated against ANVIL: the necessity for a larger OVERLORD than originally visualised; and the hold up of operations in Italy. On 6th January, with the interests of a larger OVERLORD at heart, C.O.S.S.A.C. recommended that "the assault against the south coast of France should revert to a threat on the basis of one assault division as originally conceived". On 23rd January Eisenhower, desiring a five-division OVERLORD, suggested a one-division ANVIL, with it remaining a threat until the enemy's weakness justified its active employment. On 22nd February General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean, recommended

that ANVIL be cancelled and that I be given a fresh directive to conduct operations with the object of containing the maximum number of German troops in southern Europe with the forces now earmarked to be placed at my disposal including an assault lift for one division plus.

In one sense the history of the strategy for Europe

in the first half of 1944 may be seen as the defence of ANVIL against the combination of SHINGLE [Anzio] and its sequel with the claims of OVERLORD. . . . The fate of ANVIL may indeed be regarded as a barometer of strategic thought, tracing the results of events elsewhere that impinged immediately upon it. Their effect was often expressed in, as it derived largely from, calculations of assault shipping, which even after the abandonment of the subsidiary operations [CULVERIN, BUCCANEER, and PIGSTICK (Burma) in Mountbatten's South-East Asia command, and HERCULES (Rhodes) in the Mediterranean] remained the most critical shortage during the first half of 1944, and whose detail must accordingly be followed over much of that period if the shape of strategy is to be understood.<sup>3</sup>

On 22nd March General Wilson reiterated that ANVIL should be cancelled "as at present designed", and that he should "carry out intensive operations up Italy". The same day a report from Eisenhower recommended that ANVIL "in its present conception of a two-division assault building up to ten divisions" should be abandoned, and assault shipping transferred accordingly from the Mediterranean to OVERLORD by the end of April. A result of these two reports was that ANVIL was postponed from its June date simultaneous with that of OVERLORD, to a target date of 10th July.

This postponement now emphasised the fundamental differences between British and American views on ANVIL as a contribution to Allied victory in Europe. The British Chiefs of Staff doubted that ANVIL would achieve its object of causing a major diversion from OVERLORD. Their alternative was the maintenance of the offensive in Italy for an indefinite period. If the operations in Italy were to be weakened or broken off by the withdrawal of divisions for ANVIL, the Allies would sacrifice the one area

<sup>3</sup> J. Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, Vol V, pp. 231 and 235.

where they held the initiative, and contained large enemy forces in the critical period before and surrounding OVERLORD. They wished to maintain a full offensive in Italy, to prepare for a two-division ANVIL if the situation allowed, but meanwhile to support OVERLORD with a threat to southern France. The Americans argued that the existing German strategy might not continue. An Allied advance in Italy might not contain the necessary enemy forces, a large proportion of which could be withdrawn through the Alps. Meanwhile the nine German divisions thought to be in central and southern France would remain disengaged and secure from any serious assault. The Americans wished to withdraw the necessary formations and shipping for a large-scale ANVIL as soon as the troops at Anzio had been relieved, and thereafter to maintain a limited offensive in Italy.

The discussion—at times of some warmth—continued until July, by which time advances were under way on the three existing European fronts, and two alternatives to ANVIL had been proposed by the British: a landing at Bordeaux (CALIPH), or an incursion into south-eastern Europe from Italy. The Americans, however, held firm for ANVIL, and on 2nd July, on receipt of a request from the President in reply to a final plea from Churchill in which the Prime Minister said: “We shall therefore forward your directive to General Wilson as soon as you let us know that there is no hope of reconsideration by your Chiefs of Staff or by yourself,” that directive was sent, telling Wilson that ANVIL would be launched at the earliest possible date, with every effort to meet a target date of 15th August 1944.

ANVIL under the changed code name DRAGOON, which it was given at the end of July, met its target date. The immediate objective was the capture of the French towns of St Raphael, Ste Maxime, St Tropez, and Frejus, between Toulon and Cannes, and thence to advance on Toulon and Marseilles and up the Rhone Valley. The assault convoys, which were mounted chiefly from Naples, left the Italian port between 9th and 13th of August. More than 800 warships of all types took part in the landing operations, flying among them the ensigns of eight navies, those of Britain, Canada, the United States, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Greece and Belgium. Among the 300 ships of the Royal Navy were the nine escort carriers of TF.88, commanded by Rear-Admiral Troubridge, and Captain Farncomb, the commanding officer of one of them, H.M.S. *Attacker*, was one of Australia’s representatives at the invasion.

## CHAPTER 15

### STRATEGY FOR VICTORY

IN June 1944, the American Pacific Fleet was being reorganised. The main reason was to increase the tempo of the Pacific War, but the increased size of the fleet also played its part. The Commander-in-Chief at Pearl Harbour was Admiral Nimitz. His main operational weapons as a result of the reorganisation were two fleets—Third and Fifth. The South Pacific Force had attained all its objectives, and Admiral Halsey was brought from that command (where Noumea now became an important rear base) and came under Nimitz as Commander Third Fleet. Parallel to Halsey was Admiral Spruance, Commander Fifth Fleet. Commanding all the Pacific Fleet Amphibious Forces was Vice-Admiral Turner, who personally commanded V Amphibious Force. Rear-Admiral Wilkinson commanded III Amphibious Force. Each amphibious force had a corresponding amphibious corps of ground troops.

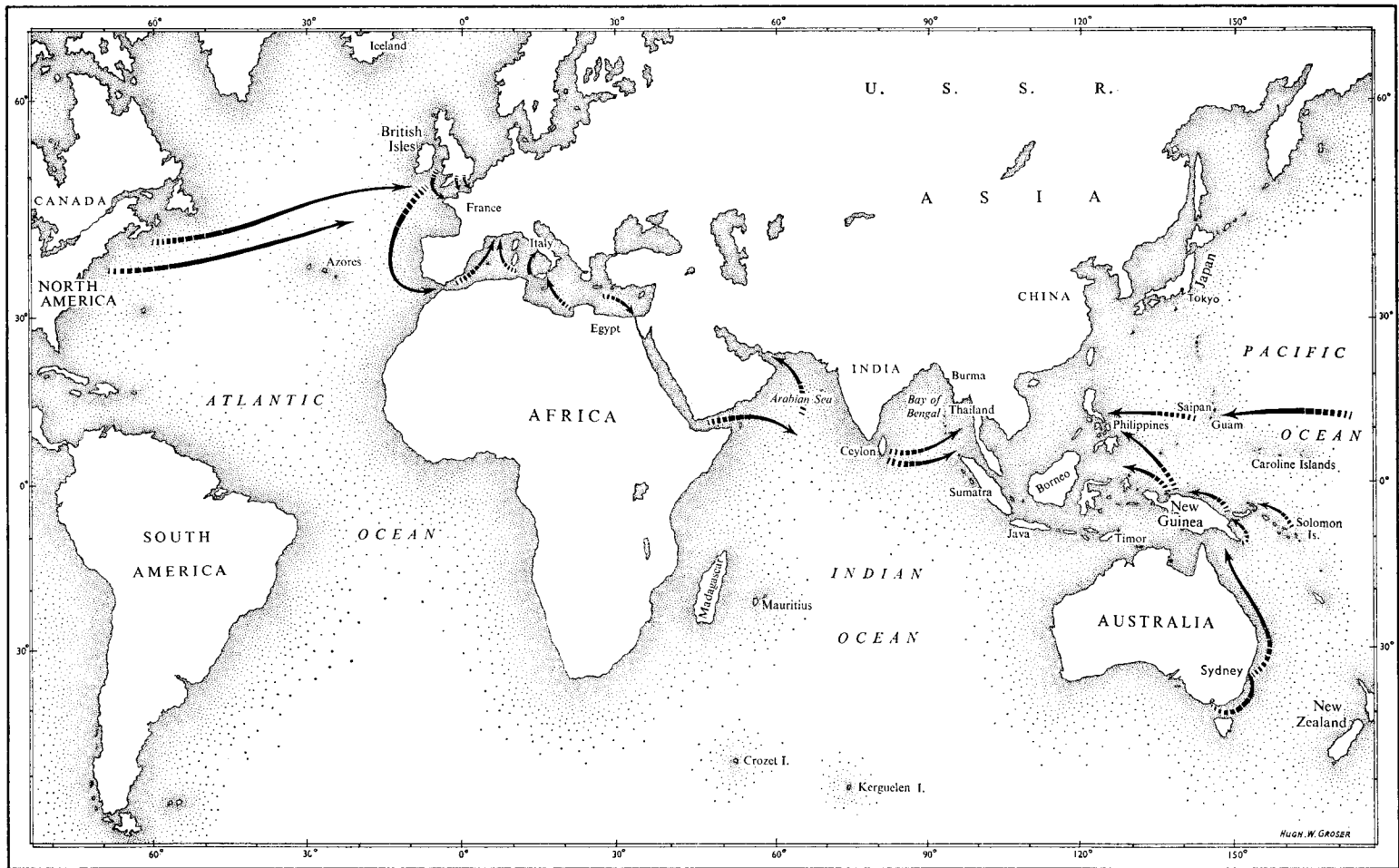
Under the reorganisation the Pacific Fleet command, but not the ships themselves, became two “teams”—Halsey’s Third Fleet and Spruance’s Fifth Fleet. In practice they were the same, save for their titles and their commanders and staffs. These last-mentioned alternated in command of the ships, and while one was operational and carried out an operation, the other planned and trained for that operation which followed. Thus ships and their companies operated almost continuously and—as Admiral Nimitz described the situation: “The team remains about the same but the drivers change.” Vice-Admiral Mitscher commanded the Fast Carrier Force of the Pacific Fleet, and this was designated TF.38 when under Halsey’s command with Third Fleet, and TF.58 when with Fifth Fleet and Spruance. The same happened with task groups, such as the battle line with the fast carriers, and the bombardment groups with the amphibious forces.

On 6th June, the date of the Allied landings in France, Mitscher’s Fast Carrier Force (*Lexington*,<sup>1</sup> Flag) sortied from Majuro in the opening move of operation FORAGER, the invasion of the Marianas. It did so as a component of Admiral Spruance’s Fifth Fleet (*Indianapolis*, Flag) and was therefore designated TF.58. It was part of a vast armada drawn from various assembly points, and comprising TF.58’s battle line; both V Amphibious Force and III Amphibious Force and their battleship bombardment groups; and cruisers, destroyers, and ancillaries.

When news of the invasion of Normandy was announced to the men of Fifth Fleet by loud speakers, it “was greeted with a roar of satisfaction”. The united efforts of the British and Americans in European and Pacific waters “made June of 1944 the greatest month yet in military and naval history”. Rear-Admiral Ainsworth, commanding one of the bombardment groups, expressed much the spirit of Ramsay’s order of the day to the

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<sup>1</sup> *Lexington*, US aircraft carrier (1943), 27,100 tons, twelve 5-in guns, 103 aircraft, 33 kts.



The mounting pressure of Allied sea power, 1944

Normandy Attack Forces when, in a message to those under his command, he said:

Today a large United States Naval Force of which your ship is a unit is on its way to take the islands of Saipan and Tinian away from the Japs, and make them give up Guam to its rightful owners.<sup>2</sup>

The first naval blows in the actual invasion of the Marianas were struck on 11th June by aircraft from TF.58 which attacked Guam, Tinian and Saipan, and continued doing so until the 15th. On the 13th, surface bombardments began, by the new fast battleships of TF.58, and were continued next day by the older "Pearl Harbour" battleships of Rear-Admiral Oldendorf's and Rear-Admiral Ainsworth's bombardment groups.

Meanwhile there were other movements, touched off by the initial air strike by TF.58 on 11th June. News of that decided Admiral Toyoda that the Americans were moving into the Marianas. The next day, as stated earlier, he suspended the KON operation to relieve Biak, and ordered KON commander, Ugaki, to join Ozawa in the Philippine Sea.

One American view<sup>3</sup> is that the U.S. submarine operations had a marked bearing on the Japanese fleet movements. At the time, eleven U.S. submarines were engaged in covering Japanese forces. Three (*Harder*, *Redfin* and *Bluefish*<sup>4</sup>) were covering the Tawitawi exits; three were stationed north of Luzon; three south of Mindanao; one at the eastern entrance to San Bernardino Strait and one at the eastern entrance to Surigao Strait. *Harder*, which left Fremantle on 26th May, sank three Japanese destroyers in the Celebes Sea between 6th and 9th June. This had a psychological effect on Toyoda, who was very submarine conscious and, "alarmed by the *Harder* foray he pulled the trigger on the A-GO plan as soon he heard of the preliminary skirmishing in the Marianas".

Ugaki sailed from Batjan in the morning of 13th June, on which day Ozawa sailed from Tawitawi, his departure reported to Pearl Harbour by *Redfin*. Ozawa fuelled on the 15th in Guimaras Strait, between Panay and Negros Islands, and the same evening entered the Philippine Sea through San Bernardino Strait—his exit therefrom being observed and reported by U.S. submarine *Flying Fish*.<sup>5</sup> That day Admiral Toyoda, from his flagship in the Inland Sea, sent *his* message to his flag and commanding officers:

On the morning of the 15th a strong enemy force began landing operations in the Saipan-Tinian area. The Combined Fleet will attack the enemy in the Marianas area and annihilate the invasion force. Activate A-GO operation for decisive battle.

Five minutes later, in another message to them, he repeated the signal addressed to his fleet 39 years earlier by Admiral Togo on the eve of the Battle of Tsushima.

<sup>2</sup> Morison, Vol VIII (p. 173), whence largely comes the material for this description of FORAGER.

<sup>3</sup> T. Roscoe, *United States Submarine Operations in World War II* (1949).

<sup>4</sup> *Harder*, *Redfin*, *Bluefish*, US submarines (1942-43), 1,526 tons, one gun (3- to 5-in), ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 20 kts. *Harder* sunk Philippines, 24 Aug 1944.

<sup>5</sup> *Flying Fish*, US submarine (1941), 1,526 tons, one gun (3- to 5-in), ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 20 kts.

The fate of the Empire rests on this one battle. Every man is expected to do his utmost.

Ozawa transmitted these words to every man in the *Mobile Fleet* as it left Guimaras anchorage.

Ozawa and Ugaki (whose presence, as Ozawa left San Bernardino Strait, was observed and reported about 200 miles E.S.E. of Surigao Strait by U.S. submarine *Seahorse*<sup>6</sup>) joined forces at 4.50 p.m. on 16th June 350 miles east of Samar Island in the Philippines. Their combined strength amounted to 9 carriers, 5 battleships, 11 heavy cruisers, 2 light cruisers, 28 destroyers. Their mission was to "annihilate" an invasion force whose covering fleet was numerically superior in every category but one, consisting as it did of 15 carriers, 7 battleships, 8 heavy cruisers, 13 light cruisers and 69 destroyers. In carrier-borne aircraft strength that of the Americans was a little more than twice the Japanese—956 to 473 taking all categories. And in total aircraft strength Ozawa was comparatively weaker than he thought: first because he was relying upon some 500 land-based aircraft at Guam, Yap, Tinian and the Palaus, to swing the balance, and that strength had been largely drained away by the TF.58 air attacks; and second because his carrier fliers were inadequately trained.

In the meantime, as Toyoda said in his message activating A-GO, the Americans assaulted Saipan on the morning of the 15th, and the first wave landed at 8.44 a.m. after heavy pre-landing naval and air bombardments. The land forces, under the command of Lieut-General Holland M. Smith, had embarked on a "long, tough job".<sup>7</sup> By nightfall, by which time about 20,000 assault troops had been landed, little more than half the planned beach-head had been occupied, and there had been heavy casualties. But on the morning of 17th June, when Ozawa was fuelling just to the eastward of where Ugaki had joined him, the beach-head was secured.

Each side had by this time a rough idea of the position and composition of the other's forces. Spruance got his information from submarines, and Ozawa mainly from air searches. It is notable that on the American side, submarines played a large and important part in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, not alone in reconnaissance, but in action also. The Japanese submarine story was different, and that service, on which so much had been staked as one which would largely restore the naval balance for the Japanese Navy, failed in this vital battle. "At least 25 RO-boats and I-boats," says the U.S. naval historian,

were employed in one way or another during the Marianas campaign. They gleaned no valuable information; they failed to sink or even to damage a single United States ship; and 17 of them were sunk by United States destroyers, destroyer escorts, or planes.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Seahorse*, US submarine (1943), 1,526 tons, one gun (3- to 5-in), ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 20 kts.

<sup>7</sup> Morison, Vol VIII, p. 199.

<sup>8</sup> Morison, p. 222.

The American submarines in the preliminaries to the battle provided valuable information upon which American moves were founded. The reports on 15th June from *Flying Fish* and *Seahorse* told Spruance that two separate enemy forces were approaching and that a major naval action was imminent, and caused him, next morning, to postpone the assault on Guam, planned for the 18th. Also on 16th June, in consultation with Admiral Turner, commanding the Saipan assault force, dispositions were made to prepare for the impending action. Five heavy and 3 light cruisers and 21 destroyers were detached from Turner's fire support groups to augment TF.58, leaving 7 battleships, 3 cruisers, and 5 destroyers to protect the Saipan beach-head. The carrier groups of TF.58 were at this time dispersed, carrying out assigned air strikes, and rendezvous for them was set for 6 p.m. on 18th June, 180 miles west of Tinian. Spruance, in *Indianapolis*, with the reinforcements from Turner's groups, set out from Saipan on the 16th to keep the rendezvous, and next day issued his battle plan: by air attack to deal first with the Japanese carriers, and then switch to the enemy battleships and cruisers to slow or disable them; the battle line to follow up with a fleet action if the Japanese elected to fight, or to sink slowed or crippled ships if they retreated. That evening, the 17th, the American submarine *Cavalla*<sup>9</sup> reported part of Ozawa's force, "fifteen or more large combatant ships", steering due east at 19 or 20 knots. They were leaving the fuelling area some 480 miles east of Samar.

On the morning of 18th June Mitscher's four American carrier groups of TF.58, and Vice-Admiral Lee's covering group of 7 battleships, 4 heavy cruisers and 14 destroyers, were within sight of each other and rendezvous was made at noon. Disposition was assumed with the carrier groups 12 miles apart on a north-south line perpendicular to the general wind direction, so that each could conduct flight operations without interfering with the others. Each occupied a circle four miles in diameter. The battle line was formed to leeward on the enemy side. The entire disposition covered an ocean area roughly 25 by 35 miles, and proceeded W.S.W. During the morning Spruance told Mitscher and Lee that TF.58 must cover Saipan and the American forces engaged there, "until information of enemy requires other action". He expected the main enemy attack from the west, but apprehended diversions from either flank. He decided therefore to advance westward during daylight and retire eastward at night to minimise the possibility of Japanese forces passing him in darkness. Throughout the 18th the searching American aircraft failed to sight the Japanese, and at 8.30 p.m., after dark, the American fleet reversed course to E. by N.

Five hours earlier, at 3.40 in the afternoon when he was about 360 miles west of TF.58, Admiral Ozawa had also reversed course of his fleet, and steamed away from the Americans in a S.S.W. direction. A few minutes before then, one of his carrier-borne reconnaissance aircraft reported sighting TF.58. Having found the enemy, he acted to exploit his

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<sup>9</sup> *Cavalla*, US submarine (1944), 1,526 tons, one gun (3- to 5-in), ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 20 kts.



advantage in having aircraft of longer range than the American, by maintaining a 400-mile gap between himself and Spruance until the moment to fight was opportune. That moment might not have been his decision had Spruance acted on information he received later that evening. At 10 p.m. a report from Admiral Nimitz at Pearl Harbour reached him, giving a high-frequency direction-finding position of the Japanese, made possible by Ozawa breaking radio silence to seek maximum cooperation from his land-based aircraft at Guam and elsewhere. The bearing placed him about 300 miles W.S.W. of where Spruance, at 8.30 p.m., reversed course. Mitscher proposed to Spruance that, having now found the Japanese, he again reverse course at 1.30 a.m. on the 19th to due west, which would put the Americans in an ideal position to launch an air strike on the enemy at daybreak. Spruance, however, rejected the proposal. There were various factors which made him doubt the accuracy of the radio bearings' position, and others which kept in his mind the possibility of a Japanese flank attack founded on a feint in the enemy's centre. He felt the responsibilities which burdened him at Saipan. As he later wrote:

We were at the start of a very large and important amphibious operation and we could not gamble and place it in jeopardy. The way Togo waited at Tsushima for the Russian Fleet to come to him has always been in my mind. We had somewhat the same basic situation.<sup>1</sup>

So TF.58 continued steering E. by N. until 5.30 a.m. on the 19th. Then for a brief period it turned N.E. into the wind to launch search aircraft, combat air and anti-submarine patrol aircraft; and at 6.19 Spruance altered course to W.S.W.—a course he had to abandon at intervals to head into the wind to launch aircraft. Meanwhile the battle had opened when, around 5.50 a.m., a Japanese bomb-laden fighter, scouting from Guam, aimed its missile at one of the battle line's destroyers, missed, and was shot down. From then until 10 a.m. most of the air fighting was over Guam, 100 miles S.E. of TF.58, where American fighters were sent to prevent the Japanese admiral, Kakuta, from cooperating with Ozawa with land-based aircraft, of which Guam's operational strength was about 50. This the Americans did successfully, to the almost total destruction of Guam's striking power. At 10 a.m. radar in Admiral Lee's battle line picked up the first Japanese carrier-borne striking force approaching and then more than 150 miles away—16 fighters, 45 fighters with bombs, and 8 torpedo-carrying aircraft. Mitscher recalled all his aircraft from Guam and ordered TF.58 to launch every available fighter. At 10.23, when the approaching Japanese aircraft were 110 miles distant, TF.58 headed into the wind for flight operations. Launching commenced at 10.23 and the flight decks were cleared of all bombers, which were instructed to orbit to the east on call. The ships were told to expect repeated attacks, and to keep fighters available to repel them.

The aircraft now approaching the American force were from Ozawa's

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<sup>1</sup> From a letter of 20th January 1952 to Rear-Admiral Morison. Quoted in Vol VIII, p. 253.

van—Vice-Admiral Kurita in the cruiser *Atago*, with battleships *Yamato*, *Musashi*, *Haruna* and *Kongo*; cruisers *Takao*, *Maya* and *Chokai*; and destroyers, and Rear-Admiral Obayashi's *Carrier Division 3*, light carriers *Chitose*, *Chiyoda* and *Zuiho*. The van force was some 100 miles ahead of Ozawa's main body with the six large carriers of *Carrier Divisions 1* and *2*. The reasons for this disposition were that it allowed best use of the battleships' and cruisers' float-planes for search, and placed the three smaller carriers with a powerful anti-aircraft screen where they would be the targets for counter-attacks, and protect the large carriers. Its weakness was that the main body was denied an adequate anti-submarine screen—a lack which was soon to be felt.

As stated above, Ozawa, at 3.40 p.m. on the 18th, set course S.S.W. to maintain a distance of 400 miles between himself and Spruance. He expected that his search planes would keep track of TF.58, and planned to strike with his utmost air strength next morning at a range of about 300 miles. In keeping with this plan he again changed course—to S.E.—at 7 p.m. on the 18th, and two hours later, to get his van the required distance ahead of the main body, he and Kurita's force set diverging courses, Ozawa S. by W., Kurita due east, for six hours. At 3 a.m. on the 19th, the van and main body being in the required relative positions, both forces turned to course N.E. Battle disposition was assumed, and was complete by 4.15 a.m. Half an hour later the launching of search planes commenced, and at 7.30 one of these sighted part of the American force. It was to the point of this sighting that the aircraft strike from Obayashi's van carriers was directed.

Action by TF.58 fighters was joined with the Japanese attackers at 10.36 a.m., some 50 to 60 miles from the American carriers, and a fierce initial mêlée ensued in which at least 25 Japanese aircraft were shot down. The 40 or so which eluded the interception continued towards their targets, and another 16 were shot down. Not one aircraft of this first attack reached the American carriers and only one direct hit was secured—on the battleship *South Dakota*. It caused 50 casualties, 27 of them fatal, but failed to impair the ship's efficiency. By 10.57 the raid was completely broken up, and 42 of the 69 Japanese aircraft failed to return.

Meanwhile Ozawa's *Carrier Division One* launched a force of 80 bombers and 48 fighters, commencing at 8.56 a.m. *Taiho*, Ozawa's flagship and newest and largest carrier in the Japanese Navy, had just completed launching the 42 aircraft which she contributed to the total of 128 in this raid, when she was struck by a torpedo from the American submarine *Albacore*,<sup>2</sup> and suffered a mortal wound, though her sinking was preceded by that of many of the aircraft she had launched. The attackers were detected by radar at 11.7 a.m., when 115 miles from the Americans and reduced in numbers by various mishaps to 109, and were met by defending fighters 60 miles out from Mitscher's flagship *Lexington*. In a fierce air

<sup>2</sup> *Albacore*, US submarine (1942), 1,526 tons, one gun (3- to 5-in), ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 20 kts. Sunk in Japanese home waters Nov 1944.

battle of some five minutes' duration, which started at 11.46 a.m., about 70 Japanese aircraft were shot down, and returning American fliers reported "a 12-mile expanse of oil slicks studded with flotsam and burning debris".<sup>3</sup> About 20 Japanese aircraft broke through the American air defence, but most were shot down or driven off by the anti-aircraft fire of the battle line in an encounter which lasted from 11.50 a.m. to a few minutes after noon. Six enemy dive bombers and a small group of torpedo bombers were all that got through to attack the American carrier groups, and the results they achieved were negligible. Of the 128 aircraft launched in this second attack, 97 failed to return.

Forty fighters (25 with bombs) and seven torpedo bombers were launched from *Carrier Division Two* between 10 and 10.15 a.m. They were intercepted some 40 miles out by fighters from the American carriers, and seven were shot down. A few broke through and made a fruitless attack on one of the carrier groups at 1.20 p.m. and escaped. Forty of the 47 got safely back to their carriers. The last Japanese attack was launched between 11 a.m. and 11.30, from *Junyo*, *Hiyo*, and *Ryuho* of *CarDivTwo*, and *Zuikaku* of *CarDivOne*. Forty fighters (10 with bombs), 36 dive bombers, and 6 torpedo bombers participated. About half of them made abortive attacks on one of the American carrier groups, and lost heavily. The largest group, of 49 aircraft from *CarDivTwo*, failed to locate their target, and headed for Guam to land. As they were circling Orote airfield preparatory to landing, they were attacked by 27 American fighters which shot 30 down. The 19 which landed were damaged beyond repair. Of the 82 Japanese aircraft in this final attack, 73 were either shot down or crippled beyond usefulness.

Soon after the aircraft of this fourth attack had taken off from the carriers, and while the parent craft were recovering the surviving aircraft from attack number 3, the American submarines scored their second big success for the day. At 12.20 p.m., *Shokaku*, one of Ozawa's own *CarDiv One* carriers, was recovering aircraft when she was struck by three torpedoes from the submarine *Cavalla*. *Shokaku* sank about 3 p.m., and *Taiho*, whose petrol tanks were ruptured by her single torpedo hit, exploded and sank soon after 5 o'clock with the loss of 1,650 of her crew of 2,150.

At 6.8 p.m. on the 19th Ozawa turned N.W. at 18 knots. The Japanese intended to fuel and then resume the attack. Meanwhile Mitscher had no information as to Ozawa's position. The last report he received was that from *Cavalla* when she torpedoed *Shokaku* at 12.20. Search aircraft failed to find the enemy. TF.58 had made easting throughout the 19th, but at 8 p.m. Spruance turned west at 23 knots. The night of the 19th-20th, spent by both sides assessing the results of the day's actions, was starlit and calm. No night searches were sent out by the Americans. The 20th dawned clear and fair, but in spite of air searches by both sides, not until 3.42 p.m. was contact made, when an aircraft from *Enterprise* sighted and reported

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<sup>3</sup> Morison, Vol VIII, p. 270.

the Japanese "spread out in three groups . . . heading west at slow speed, apparently fuelling".<sup>4</sup> Three-quarters of an hour later TF.58 turned into the wind, and within 15 minutes was back on its course, after having launched 216 aircraft from eleven carriers—85 fighters, 77 dive bombers, and 54 torpedo bombers. They had some 300 miles to cover to reach their target, flying at 130 to 140 knots, and by the time they sighted the enemy the setting sun's lower limb was just touching the horizon. In the dusk a 20-minute air-surface battle was fought in the scene made vivid with the "blue, yellow, lavender, pink, red, white and black" colour effects of the intense Japanese anti-aircraft fire. The defenders suffered heavily. The carrier *Hiyo* was sunk by torpedoes; other ships were damaged—*Zuikaku* extremely; and some 30 Japanese aircraft were shot down. On the morning of 19th June Ozawa had 430 aircraft in his nine carriers. By dawn on the 20th that number had been reduced to 100. By nightfall on the 20th his carrier strength was reduced to six, and his flag log of the operation ended the day with the entry: "Surviving carrier air power: 35 aircraft operational." It was the night recovery after the action which inflicted the greater loss on the American aircraft. According to Admiral Mitscher's report, 20 aircraft were missing and presumably shot down in combat; but 80 were destroyed by deck crashes or landings in the sea in the night recovery operation. Of the total complement of the 100 aircraft lost in the day's activities, 49 pilots and crewmen were lost out of a total of 209.

The Japanese, in addition to their aircraft losses in combat, also were hit hard by night-landing casualties on the 20th. By the end of the day Ozawa had received an order from Toyoda to retire, and the *Mobile Fleet*—6 carriers, 5 battleships, 13 cruisers and 28 destroyers—made for Okinawa, where it arrived in the early afternoon of 22nd June. For part of the retirement the Americans carried out a stern chase with the battle line, but with a widening distance between the two fleets. Spruance, with no sightings of the enemy reported by his search planes, broke off the chase at 8.30 p.m. on the 21st, when the two fleets were more than 300 miles apart, and returned to Saipan.

May 1942 saw in the Battle of the Coral Sea the first aircraft battle in naval history, the first naval air battle in which the opposing surface forces never made contact. June 1944 saw, in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, the greatest aircraft carrier battle of the war. It decided the fate of the Marianas by giving the United States Navy command of the surrounding sea and air, and thus dooming the Japanese land forces on Saipan, Tinian and Guam. And in so doing it decided the outcome of the Far Eastern war. What had been a keystone in Japanese defence now became a stepping-stone in the ultimate advance to the home islands.

The Americans landed on Saipan on the morning of 15th June 1944. On 6th July the two senior Japanese commanders on the island, General Saito and Admiral Nagumo, the former commander of *First Air Fleet* and

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<sup>4</sup> Morison, Vol VIII, p. 291.

*Pearl Harbour Striking Force*, committed suicide. On 10th July the American flag was officially raised at the headquarters of General Holland Smith. But not until 10th August did Admiral Spruance announce the capture and occupation of the island to be complete, and "months and even years elapsed before all the enemy holdouts surrendered or were liquidated". It was a costly victory—a more costly defeat—in human lives. Of a total of 67,451 employed in the taking of Saipan, the Americans suffered 16,525 casualties, 3,426 of them fatal. They buried 23,811 enemy dead. General Holland Smith later said that he always considered Saipan "the decisive battle of the Pacific offensive. Saipan was Japan's administrative Pearl Harbour . . . the naval and military heart and brain of Japanese defence strategy."

Tinian, south-west of Saipan and separated from that island by the three-mile wide Saipan Channel, was assaulted on 24th July, after preliminary air bombings and naval bombardments for six weeks or so, and an intensive pre-landing bombardment;<sup>5</sup> by the close of the day 15,614 marines, soldiers and sailors were on shore. The island was secured on 1st August. But "mopping up" continued for three months.

The assault on Guam, originally planned for 18th June, was postponed, first to defeat Ozawa, and second because the toughness of the fighting in Saipan convinced the American commanders that an additional division should be allocated to the Guam operation. It eventually took place on 21st July, after 13 days of continuous naval bombardment—"not only the most systematically conducted naval bombardment to date, it was the most prolonged of the war".<sup>6</sup> On 12th August the enemy's last command post was stormed. "Thus, in three weeks after the landing, the battle for Guam was won."

## II

Whilst in July the Americans of the northern thrust were assaulting and securing the Marianas, operations continued in the conquest of New Guinea, and in these the Australian ships of TF.74 participated.

On 10th July 1944 Task Force 74 was in Seeadler Harbour, where it arrived four days earlier from Humboldt Bay after the assault and capture of Noemfoor Island. On arrival at Seeadler, *Shropshire*, which had returned to New Guinea after her repair and refit period in Sydney, rejoined the Task Force. The next operation on General MacArthur's program was a landing at Sansapor on the Vogelkop Peninsula. This operation—GLOBETROTTER—was planned for 30th July, and TF.74 was exercising in preparation therefor. The main object of GLOBETROTTER was the securing of

<sup>5</sup> "American bluejackets," records Morison in *New Guinea and the Marianas* (p. 353) "had felt no compunctions about shooting up Japanese-held islands; but on approaching Tinian some were heard to express regret that this pretty island had to be 'taken apart'." Just 202 years earlier, in August 1742, Lord Anson and his ship's company in *Centurion*, remarked the attractiveness of Tinian when they arrived there on the famous Voyage Round the World: "The prospect of the country did by no means resemble that of an uninhabited and uncultivated place; but had much more the air of a magnificent plantation where large lawns and stately woods had been laid out together with great skill, and where the whole had been so artfully combined, and so judiciously adapted to the slopes of the hills, and the inequalities of the ground, as to produce a most striking effect."

<sup>6</sup> Morison, pp. 379 and 400.

airfield sites on the Vogelkop as a preliminary to the seizure of Halmahera on 15th September, the date on which the Pacific Fleet was to seize the Palaus. The U.S. 6th Infantry Division (Typhoon Task Force) was to make the Vogelkop landing, and planning started at General Krueger's headquarters at Humboldt Bay on 8th July.

Meanwhile events back along the New Guinea line cut short TF.74's training period at Seeadler. As stated earlier, in May General Adachi's bypassed *XVIII Japanese Army*, cut off by the Allied seizure of Aitape, had forced back the eastern perimeter there established from the Dandriwad River to the Driniumor. The Japanese maintained searching pressure, and used barge traffic for the transport of troops and supplies along the coast from Wewak. This traffic was harassed by American P.T. boats which, in turn, were pestered by gunfire from enemy battery positions to the eastward of Aitape and in the Wewak area. On 10th July Admiral Kinkaid directed Commodore Collins to proceed with TF.74 and bombard these enemy gun positions, which were on the islands of Muschu and Kairiru off Wewak, and also at points on the mainland. That same day the Japanese launched a major attack against the Allied positions along the Driniumor River. The first assaults were repulsed, but during the night the enemy succeeded in breaching a 1,300-yard gap in the Allied line, and for a month thereafter there was bitter jungle fighting between the coast and the Torricelli Mountains six miles inland.

TF.74—*Australia, Shropshire, Arunta, Warramunga, Ammen and Bache*—sailed from Seeadler Harbour at 10 a.m. on 12th July and reached Aitape at 7 next morning. The Japanese attack caused Kinkaid to issue a new directive which Collins received on passage, telling him to "furnish gun support Aitape Task Force. Continue operations as required by tactical situation." Collins found that the Aitape Task Force held a comparatively small but well-fortified perimeter of shallow depth inland (about two miles) and thus bordered closely on Tadjik airfield. An enemy force estimated at two divisions, reported to be in fair physical condition and well armed, was advancing from the eastward. An American force of four battalions was holding the line of the Driniumor River, and the enemy had driven through the centre, forcing a withdrawal. During the day, however, an American counter-attack regained the line of the Driniumor River except for a small gap in the centre. The Commanding General, Major-General Charles P. Hall, asked for naval help for the anti-barge operations of the P.T. boats; interruption to troop and truck movement along the coastal road westward from Wewak; bombardments of enemy concentrations; and fire support as called for. Hall said that he was expecting reinforcements of combat troops in *Matsonia*, when he contemplated making an amphibious landing to the rear of the enemy attacking the Driniumor River line. Collins agreed to furnish neutralising bombardment prior to the landing.

At intervals from 14th July, ships of the Task Force—which was briefly enlarged on the 16th when U.S. destroyers *Hutchins* and *Beale* joined for

temporary duty—every day carried out these various missions of bombardment, supporting the P.T. boats, answering calls for fire, and shelling the coast road. In all bombardment missions, air spotting was provided by aircraft of No. 71 Wing R.A.A.F., based on Tadjji airfield. On 18th July General Hall told Collins that Intelligence indicated that the Japanese in the Aitape area were preparing for an attack in strength, and it was estimated that this attack could be made on the 20th. In the meantime *Matsonia*'s arrival with troop reinforcements was still awaited, and until they were available it was not possible to carry out the projected amphibious landing in the Japanese rear. In reply to a report from Collins outlining the situation on shore and recommending continued naval support,<sup>7</sup> Kinkaid said that TF.74 would continue to support the Aitape Task Force until 26th July. Three days later Kinkaid directed that *Australia* and *Warramunga* were to be sailed to Sydney for docking and overhaul, and that not later than the morning of the 25th, TF.74 was to proceed to Humboldt Bay to replenish and prepare for GLOBETROTTER. Collins accordingly transferred his broad pendant to *Shropshire*, and in the afternoon of 22nd July *Australia* and *Warramunga* sailed for Sydney.

Three days later the depleted Task Force—*Shropshire*, *Hutchins*, *Beale*, *Bache*, *Ammen* and *Arunta*—sailed for Humboldt Bay. *Matsonia* and her troops had not arrived, but General Hall's corps held the Driniumor line from which, forced by exhaustion of ammunition and supplies caused by the severing of his supply lines, Adachi had to fall back on 9th August. The Japanese lost about half of the 20,000 troops used in this abortive attempt to recapture Aitape, the holding of which cost the Americans 400 killed and about 2,600 wounded.

In some "General Remarks" on the Aitape mission, Collins said that the joint operations of destroyers and P.T. boats at night "successfully stifled the barge traffic". Japanese truck activity on the coastal road was considerably reduced by destroyer shelling. The effect of all the bombardments carried out could not be assessed, but information given by a prisoner of war testified to the good results obtained by *Australia* and *Warramunga* at the initial bombardment on 14th July. On the 16th Collins received a signal from General Hall:

Preliminary reports interrogation prisoner of war indicate naval bombardment vicinity Yakumul 14th July highly effective. Prisoner estimated 500 Japs in area at time. Saw many dead. Destroyed field piece. Remainder fled to hills abandoning equipment subsequently destroyed. This believed to be forward elements of Nip divisions. Well done.

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<sup>7</sup> CTF.74 to Com 7th Fleet, 180506, July 1944. "At conference this afternoon Com Gen Aitape explained that projected landing deferred owing non arrival *Matsonia* and indications that enemy are massing for large scale attack shortly. Both Com Gen and myself are of opinion that naval support should remain until situation here is cleared up. Present situation invites decision that task force remains at Aitape until afternoon 24th arriving Seeadler next day and sailing for GLOBETROTTER 26th or Task Force could join TF.75 direct from Aitape. If situation ashore not well in hand by 24th and if amphibious landing still projected it will be necessary appreciate relative importance between Aitape operations and cover for GLOBETROTTER with view leaving here some or all of task force."



*(Australian War Memorial)*

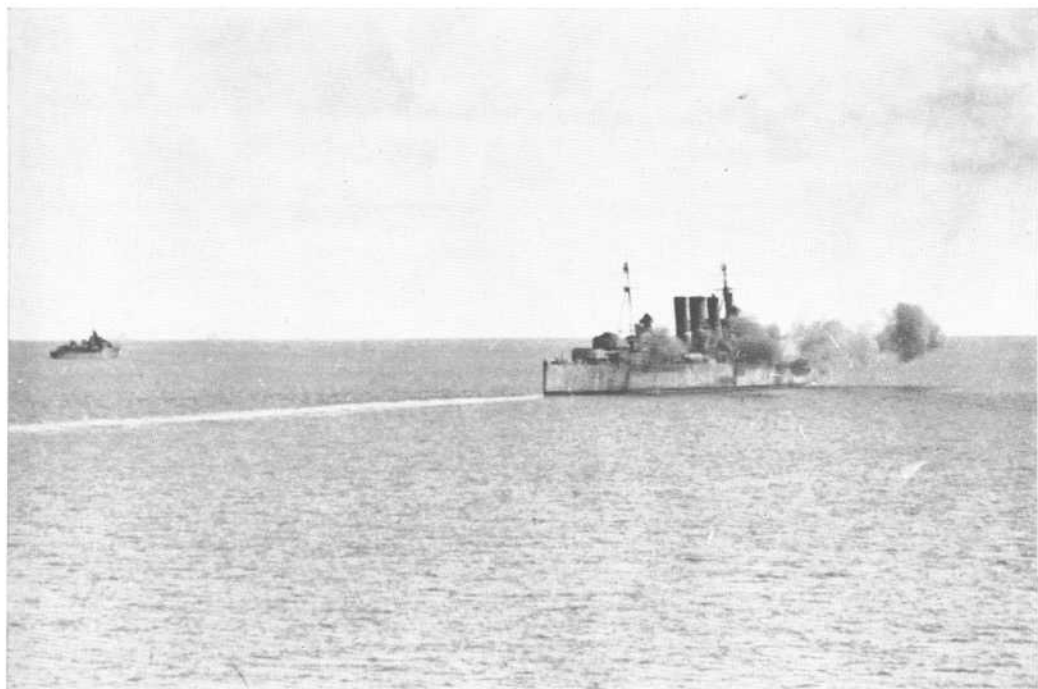
Australian M.L's bombarding Karkar Island, 16th May 1944.



*(Netherlands I.G. Information Service)*

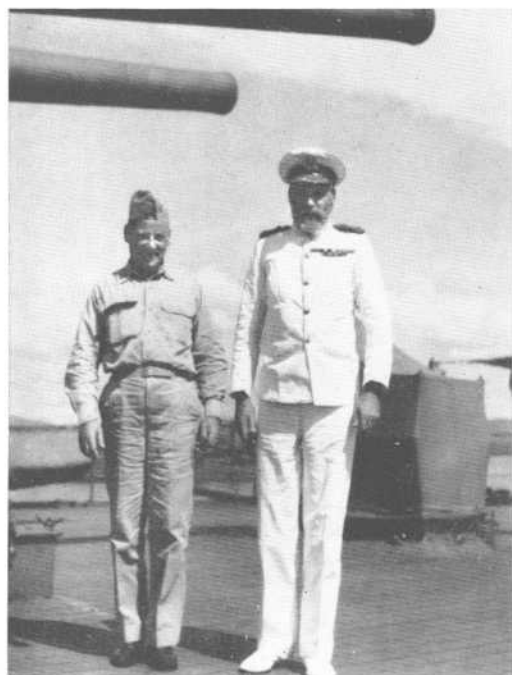
Group of officers and ratings, H.M.A.S. *Westralia*, October 1944.





(Argus, Melbourne)

H.M.A.S. *Australia* bombarding Mokmer, Biak Island, 27th May 1944.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Rear-Admiral R. S. Berkey, U.S.N., with Rear-Admiral Crutchley on board *Australia*, 3rd June 1944.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Captain E. F. V. Dechaineux, R.A.N.

The Gunner's Mate of *Warramunga*, Donald Walker,<sup>8</sup> in a letter written after the war, referred to this incident:

I have in mind a shoot we did, which could have had considerable tactical results—that is to say it possibly affected Japanese operations to a considerable degree when they were in pretty bad shape. In the vicinity of Yakumul, near Aitape, in July 1944, the captain (Commander Mackinnon) sent for me one night when an air force pilot had come aboard and reported seeing a concentration of Jap troops at a track fork in the scrub. I was Control Officer at this time and we studied the map, and set off for the spot next morning with an aircraft to observe for us. After our third searching salvo the aircraft ordered "Left 50 Up 50. Fire for effect." After the next he reported "Beautiful shooting. You're right in among them." We fired 200 rounds rapid.

In his "General Remarks" Commodore Collins commented on the valuable contribution made by the R.A.A.F.

The accuracy of these bombardments was ensured by excellent air spotting. Beauforts of 71 Wing RAAF gave this spotting and deserve much credit for the efficient manner in which it was undertaken, particularly since the airmen were not trained spotters and a Beaufort is hardly a suitable plane for the work.

TF.74, less *Australia* and *Warramunga*, arrived at Humboldt Bay at noon, 25th July. At 10 a.m. on the 28th it sailed—*Shropshire*, *Hutchins*, *Bache*, *Beale*, *Ammen* and *Arunta*—to rendezvous with CTF.75 and form TF.78, whose mission was to act as a covering force during the occupation of Cape Sansapor. Rendezvous was effected at 5 p.m., and the force covered the Sansapor operation. The assault group, of eleven destroyers, five destroyer transports, 19 L.C.I's, 8 L.S.T's, four P.C's and a fleet tug, sailed from Tum and Wakde on 27th July and the landing, in six waves, was carried out within an hour, starting at 7 a.m. on 30th July. There was no pre-landing bombardment. TF.78 patrolled as necessary until, on 30th July, no further close support was required, when it proceeded to Mios Wundi to replenish fuel and provisions.

### III

The day TF.74 left Aitape and reached Humboldt Bay was a notable one in the Indian Ocean. It was that on which the Eastern Fleet, for the first time since it turned to the offensive, brought the guns of its ships to bear in action against Japanese shore defences. On 25th July, when the fleet went right up to Sabang Island, the Japanese naval base off northern Sumatra at the entrance to the Strait of Malacca, an Australian ship, H.M.A.S. *Quickmatch*, took a prominent part in the proceedings.

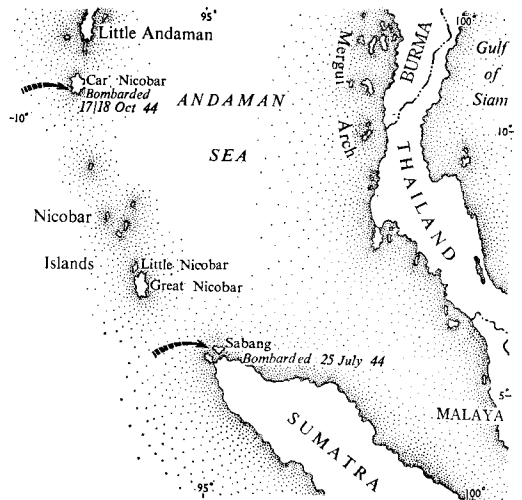
The abandonment of *BUCCANEER* and other projected amphibious operations across the Bay of Bengal limited the offensive operations of the Eastern Fleet to large-scale raids. So far these had been carrier-borne air strikes, but now a more ambitious operation was planned. Under the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Somerville, with his flag in *Queen Elizabeth*, the fleet left Trincomalee on 22nd July. Other capital ships in addition to

<sup>8</sup> CPO D. A. Walker, 19591; RAN. HMAS's *Warramunga* and *Canberra*. B. Bendigo, Vic, 9 Dec 1912.

the flagship were the battleships *Valiant* and French *Richelieu* and battle cruiser *Renown*; aircraft carriers *Illustrious* and *Victorious*; seven cruisers; and 10 destroyers under Commodore (D) A. L. Poland, including the Australian *Quickmatch* (Lieut-Commander Rhoades).<sup>9</sup>

The fleet approached Sabang during the night of 24th-25th July, when the carrier force was detached to an operating area 35 miles W.N.W. of the target. Fighter striking forces were flown off at first light on the 25th and achieved complete surprise in attacks on Sabang airfields. At 6.55 a.m. the ships opened fire. The battle fleet bombarded harbour installations, coast defence batteries and military barracks at Sabang; the cruisers bombarded the wireless station on Pulo Weh, and engaged in counter-battery fire adjacent to the town of Sabang; the destroyers attacked a radar station on the island's north-west promontory. Soon after the battleships opened fire an inshore force, consisting of destroyers *Quilliam*, *Quality* and *Quickmatch*, and the Dutch cruiser *Tromp*, entered the harbour and carried out a close-range bombardment of installations, withdrawing when the bombardment was completed under close cover of fire from cruisers *Gambia* and *Kenya*. *Tromp* and the two R.N. destroyers suffered hits, the destroyers each sustaining a fatal casualty. Admiral Somerville later described the entry of this group into Sabang Harbour as "spectacular and inspiring. The ships were obviously determined to take full advantage of the opportunity offered for close range action. Their ammunition expenditure included 208 rounds of 5.9-inch and 717 of 4.7-inch." From what was seen by the firing ships and spotting aircraft, confirmed later by photographic reconnaissance, the damage inflicted on all targets was considerable.

This was the last operation to be planned and executed by Admiral Somerville. On 23rd August he was succeeded as Commander-in-Chief by Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, formerly Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet. Admiral Somerville was appointed head of the British Admiralty Delegation in Washington.



Surface bombardments by Eastern Fleet, 1944

<sup>9</sup> Poland and Rhoades were well known to each other. On 5th February 1941, Captain Poland became Senior Naval Officer, Inshore Squadron, the command first held (15th December 1940-5th January 1941) by Captain H. M. L. Waller, RAN. The Australian destroyers of the 10th Flotilla—of which Rhoades commanded *Vendetta*—were prominent in that squadron operating in support of the army in the North African campaign of the period.

## IV

In 1944 two matters of moment concerned the Australian and British Governments and their respective naval authorities. One was the manning problem. The other was the basing of the Eastern Fleet on Australia. By the middle of the year the end of the war, if not actually in sight, could be foreseen; and it could be foreseen as an Allied victory, first in the West, where the "Beat Hitler First" policy's fruit was ripening, and, at some later date, in the East against Japan. It was the desire of both Australia and Britain to be associated as closely and actively as possible with the coming victory over Japan in the East, which now brought these matters to the forefront.

In October 1943 the Combined Planning Staff produced a study for the defeat of Japan within twelve months of that of Germany—which was assumed to have taken place by 1st October 1944. The study recommended that the Western Allies should aim at the capture of Formosa from the Pacific in the spring of 1945, retaining the option to undertake the CULVERIN operation against northern Sumatra in the autumn (or possibly spring) of 1945 if the Formosa operation had to be postponed. The Japanese main islands might be invaded in the autumn of 1946. It was assumed that the bulk of the British Fleet, particularly aircraft carriers, would help in the operation. This recommendation was adopted at the Cairo Conference, where it was agreed that the main effort against the Japanese should be made in the Pacific, where the advance would be, in the South-West Pacific, along the New Guinea-Netherlands East Indies-Philippines axis, concurrently with operations in the Central Pacific for the capture of the Mandated Islands. The conclusions of the study, as they affected the British, were

that all activities against Japan were to conform to the two main attacks through the central and south-west Pacific; that the final approach to Japan was not decided, although the central Pacific seemed to offer the greater attractions; that the British effort by sea, for which the forces were defined in detail, was to be mainly in the Pacific, although in which area was not yet certain; that the British should make their main effort by land in 1944 in south-east Asia, for which adequate bases were to be built in India, and should later provide a small contingent with its attendant assault shipping in the south-west Pacific. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The Admiralty wished to address to the Naval Board some questions arising from this Cairo decision (regarding which the Australian Government had learned only from a brief report sent through the High Commissioner), and the British Chiefs of Staff drafted a telegram to the Australian Government and, on 30th December 1943, sent it to Mr Churchill

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<sup>1</sup> Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, Vol V (p. 425), from which source this discussion of developments in British and Australian strategy in the Pacific in 1944 has been largely drawn. The British naval forces in the Far East referred to above were to be allocated so as to provide enough strength in the Indian Ocean to maintain communications with the Andaman Islands if captured, and to carry out operations and threats against Japanese positions in South-East Asia. All other available units would be concentrated for the main effort in the Pacific. It was estimated that by June 1944 the British Pacific Fleet would consist of one battleship, 9 or 10 carriers, 6 cruisers, 16 fleet destroyers, 12 frigates, and a number of repair ships and auxiliaries. By August 1944 it would be substantially reinforced.

for approval before transmission. This initiated a nine-months' debate, which involved the Prime Minister and the Chiefs of Staff in what was perhaps their most serious disagreement of the war.

Meanwhile the Australian Government was concerned with developments in the Pacific War and with its growing manpower problem, and, also in October 1943, represented its views to Churchill, seeking the British Government's thoughts on the future balance of the Australian war effort. On the 1st of the month the War Cabinet affirmed the principles:

It is of vital importance to the future of Australia and her status at the peace table in regard to the settlement in the Pacific that her *military effort* should be concentrated as far as possible in the Pacific and that it should be on a scale to guarantee her an effective voice in the peace settlement. If necessary, the extent of this effort should be maintained at the expense of commitments in other theatres. In the interests of Australia and the British Empire in the Pacific, it is imperative that this view should be accepted by the United Kingdom and the other Dominions, especially New Zealand and Canada. It was decided that these views should be represented to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in the first instance and a picture of the whole problem placed before him. The A.I.F. having returned to Australia, the remaining overseas commitments relate to the Navy and the Air Force.

At this stage the Royal Australian Navy comprised 324 vessels ranging from the four cruisers to 44 "miscellaneous".<sup>2</sup> Of these, 19—6 destroyers and 13 corvettes—were serving overseas with the Eastern Fleet. The total strength of the navy was 35,359 men and women, these last mentioned numbering 1,748—1,715 W.R.A.N.S. and 33 Nurses. Of the 33,611 officers and men, 13,817 were afloat on the Australia Station; 2,285 were in the destroyers and corvettes overseas with the Eastern Fleet; 1,119 were overseas in various categories with the Royal Navy; 2,404 were in advanced bases in the Pacific; 874 were missing or prisoners of war; 2,766 were New Entry; and 10,346 were on shore in Australia.

The naval building program included under construction at the time one Tribal-class destroyer (*Bataan*<sup>3</sup>); 9 frigates (of a total of 22 on order); 5 corvettes (which would complete the 60 ordered); 8 Fairmiles (which would complete the program of 35); and 9 H.D.M.L.'s (of nine ordered). The provision for manning these vessels as they came into commission was a matter troubling the Government because of the growing stringency of the manpower situation.

In October 1943 the monthly intake into the three Services was on a basis of 3,000 men and 2,000 women. The army was to release a net total of 20,000 men by January 1944, and by the end of that month another 20,000 were to be released by the Munitions and Aircraft "bloc". The War Cabinet agreed in principle that the navy should be limited to a strength to be governed by its capacity to replace its wastage by the

<sup>2</sup> Four cruisers, 10 destroyers, 3 Landing Ships Infantry, 3 sloops, 49 corvettes, 5 auxiliary A/S vessels, 20 auxiliary M/S vessels, 1 minelayer, 3 issuing ships, 1 oiler, 4 depot ships, 4 boom defence vessels, 6 boom gate vessels, 5 tugs, 2 cable repair ships, 5 survey ships, 27 Fairmile motor launches, 3 harbour defence motor launches, 18 air sea rescue boats, 76 Naval Auxiliary Patrol craft, 31 channel patrol boats, 44 miscellaneous.

<sup>3</sup> HMAS *Bataan*, destroyer (1945), 1,927 tons, six 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

return of the 3,404 officers and men serving overseas—"even though the destroyers and minesweepers are part of the Eastern Fleet which will be used in future operations from the Indian Ocean against Japan"—and from its existing numbers in Australia.

With regard to the War Cabinet's reference to the future use of the Eastern Fleet in operating against Japan "from the Indian Ocean", it was this use which formed the basis of the divergence of views between Mr Churchill and his Ministers on the one hand, and the Chiefs of Staff on the other. These last mentioned supported the Cairo decision regarding the conduct of the war against Japan, and the part therein for the British Fleet. The British Prime Minister, his Ministers, and the Foreign Office, favoured the South-East Asia Command strategy—to keep the centre of gravity of the British war against Japan in the Bay of Bengal, and to conduct amphibious operations on a considerable scale against the Andamans, the Nicobars and Sumatra as resources became available.

During the first three months of 1944 the opposing sides in this disagreement elaborated and presented their views without breaking the deadlock which developed. There were strong factors which militated against agreement. The Prime Minister's mind was set upon his favourite conception, operation CULVERIN—the major attack on northern Sumatra and Malaya. "This," he told the Supreme Commander, S.E.A.C., Mountbatten, on 10th January 1944, "I am determined to press to the very utmost, day in day out." The Chiefs of Staff favoured the Pacific strategy, and this would hamstring CULVERIN. On 10th January 1944 they told Churchill that the main feature of the Cairo plan was that

instead of fighting slow war in south-east Asian jungles, British and U.S. efforts are concerted in Pacific, where a double thrust by combined navies and amphibious forces drives straight through to Formosa area in spring 1945. . . . If new strategy gains final approval "First Culverin", requiring considerable naval and carrier-borne air support may well be inappropriate in early stages. . . . Prospects of undertaking "First Culverin" in autumn 1944 are slender in any case, since necessary assault shipping cannot reach south-east Asia in time unless Germany collapses before "Overlord". If our Pacific advance should get held up agree with you that "First Culverin" would definitely be best operation to undertake.<sup>4</sup>

This plan did not find favour with the British Foreign Office, which saw in it a diplomatic loss to Britain. On 14th December 1943, Eden, the Foreign Secretary, had stated in the House of Commons that

the war with Japan is not one in which we in this country are playing the part of benevolent assistants. Even if we are compelled for the time being to devote the greater part of our human and material resources to the task of defeating Germany, we are still principals in the Far Eastern war.<sup>5</sup>

The Foreign Office held that the strategy advocated by South-East Asia Command would, apart from its military aspects, have immediate psychological and political effects which would contribute materially to the defeat

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<sup>4</sup> Ehrman, Vol V, p. 426.

<sup>5</sup> Ehrman, p. 439.

of Japan. On the other hand, in the Pacific strategy the role of the British in the Far East was conceived merely as a contribution to the American; this would not appeal to the British people when called on to continue the war against Japan after the defeat of Germany; and it would not satisfy the Dominions. "If the Pacific strategy is accepted," the Foreign Office told Churchill, "and if there is to be no major British role in the Far Eastern War, then it is no exaggeration to say that the solidarity of the British Commonwealth and its influence in the maintenance of peace in the Far East will be irretrievably damaged."

This view, stressing the importance of the British themselves reconquering the Malay Peninsula, was held by Churchill and his Ministerial colleagues throughout the first half of 1944, in opposition to the Chiefs of Staff. But it was by no means certain that it reflected that of the Dominions. Towards the end of 1943 Curtin had told visiting British authorities that he would like to see British representation in the Pacific, and a Commonwealth Command formed in the South-West Pacific to partner a revised American Command. Alternatively, the boundaries of the South-East Asia Command might be revised to include a part of the South-West Pacific Area, and Australian forces placed under Mountbatten's control.

The matter was still unresolved in March 1944, when Curtin asked Churchill if there had been any progress in the Cairo plans. The result of a Staff Conference called by Churchill to decide on a reply was to disclose that the necessary data to formulate it was lacking, and Australian cooperation in assembling the data was sought. Meanwhile, at this juncture the Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed their views on S.E.A.C. strategy to the British. Saying that "the greatest contribution which could be made to the defeat of Japan by the South-East Asia Command is to assist in providing timely direct support of the Pacific advance to the China-Formosa-Luzon triangle", they urged "that the necessary directive be issued to Admiral Mountbatten to undertake the most vigorous action to capture Upper Burma during the remainder of this dry season, throughout the monsoon, and next fall, in order to increase the capacity of the air transport line to China and expedite the laying of a pipeline to that country".

The fruits of the planning arising from the Australian inquiry and the resulting assembly of data was a paper in April 1944 from the Joint Planners proposing that "the main British effort against Japan should take the form of an advance on the general axis Timor-Celebes-Borneo-Saigon". With target date March 1945, it was assumed that the advance would be based on northern and western Australia. Because both Japanese strength and the weather were doubtful factors in Timor, it was decided to bypass that island by an initial attack on Ambon, and thence attack north Borneo either directly or via the Celebes. The Planners concluded that this proposed "Middle Strategy" had three advantages: it would place British naval forces in the Pacific; it would enable the British to reach Borneo sooner than would otherwise be the case; and it would enable

them to attack Malaya from the east as well as from across the Bay of Bengal.

A new consideration now arose, that of alternatively approaching northern Borneo by passing north of New Guinea, using the Americans' communications and air support from Mindanao. This would be a British-Dominions advance, based on east Australia. This "Modified Middle Strategy", as it was called, had the advantages of possibly enabling the British to participate in operations against Formosa if the Americans were delayed in their program; and of making it easier for them to take part in subsequent operations against Japan. By the beginning of May 1944, there were five possible strategies for consideration: CULVERIN, Burma-China, the Pacific Strategy, the Middle Strategy and the Modified Middle Strategy. The operational aspects having been discussed, the decision now hinged on the relative advantages of maintenance and supply, and inquiries revolved around the respective merits of India and Australia as the main base, the implications for merchant shipping, and the requirements for a Fleet Train.

These inquiries concluded that India was not satisfactory as a main base because of various factors: the immediate base requirements of a fleet could be met, but prospects of rapidly increasing the capacity were unpromising. The ports were inadequate, coastal shipping was scarce, the railways were unable to handle large quantities, and supply facilities were limited.<sup>6</sup> The political and economic atmospheres were unsettled.

In London little was known about the Australian scene and the country's facilities as a major base. Of the three Services, only the navy had much information, and its figures were now out of date since the country had been placed in the American sphere, with resultant developments unknown to the British. The Admiralty Mission to the South-West Pacific, consisting of Rear-Admiral Daniel and three Royal Navy officers, arrived in Australia in April 1944, "to examine in collaboration with Australian officers the facilities necessary here to establish British naval forces to operate in the Pacific, using Australia as the base for such operations".

Daniel attended a meeting of the Advisory War Council at Canberra on 2nd May, and outlined the situation regarding the proposed use of the British Pacific Fleet. He told of the Cairo Conference decision that the major effort against Japan should be made in the Pacific, and briefly described the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean strategies. He said that the general feeling in Washington was that the United States naval forces were self-sufficient for the task in the Pacific, but since losses might increase as operations continued

they did not, therefore, exclude the possibility of British assistance in the Pacific. If, however, Britain were committed in the Indian Ocean and operations in Malaya

<sup>6</sup> "The landborne traffic of India was carried almost entirely by rail; but approximately nine-tenths of the railroad had only single track. . . . In April 1944, the number of locomotives in India, with an area roughly the size of Europe, was less than that possessed by the L.M.S. Company in Britain. With a recent increase of some 40 per cent in military commitments, the position was obviously grave." Ehrman, Vol V, p. 465.



and adjacent areas did not proceed as rapidly as expected, we would not be able to come to the assistance of the United States forces. In this event, both prongs of the advance would be held up.

Daniel expressed his personal view that the Pacific strategy was the correct one. Immense operations would be necessary for the defeat of Japan, and there could not be too great a preponderance of strength. Royal Navy forces should be based on Australia and operate through the New Hebrides, Solomons, Admiralty Islands to the Philippines. Until Germany was defeated only a British task force could be sent to the Pacific, but after Germany's defeat a considerable fleet could be made available, comprising 4 to 6 modern battleships, 4 fleet carriers, 7 light carriers, 18 escort carriers, 12 cruisers, 60 destroyers, 100 escort vessels, 900 carrier-based and 300 land-based aircraft, 24 submarines, and two amphibious divisions. The Indian Ocean strategy would be discarded if forces were concentrated in the Pacific, and only a weak naval force would be retained in the Indian Ocean. Adoption of the Pacific strategy would mean that Australia would become the base of the advance of the British Fleet against Japan. This would entail a considerable expansion of the facilities at Sydney and elsewhere.

At this time the Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, was in London, where from 1st May to 15th May the Prime Ministers of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa met the British Prime Minister in conference. An Indian representative and staff officers of the various services attended some of the discussions. The war against Japan was first discussed by the conference at two meetings on 3rd May and, to relieve the uncertainty of both Australia and New Zealand about the future balance of their war efforts, the subject was referred for examination to the Minister of Production with Curtin and the New Zealand Prime Minister, Fraser, and to the Chiefs of Staff with General Blamey and Lieut-General Puttick<sup>7</sup> of New Zealand. At a meeting at Chequers on 21st May, Mr Curtin announced that, allowing for the export of food to Britain on an agreed scale, and for the export of grain to India,<sup>8</sup> the Australian Navy would, if required, be maintained at its existing strength plus construction already approved; the Australian Army would field six divisions; and an air force of 53 squadrons would be attained by December 1944.

The "construction already approved" for the navy included that of one cruiser and one destroyer "on priority with but after that of ship repairs, at an estimated cost of £4,500,000 for the cruiser and £2,000,000 for the destroyer". This had been agreed to by the War Cabinet on 4th April. At the same meeting the War Cabinet also agreed (subject to a

<sup>7</sup> Lt-Gen Sir Edward Puttick, KCB, DSO. Comd 4 NZ Bde 1940-41, NZ forces Crete 1941; CGS NZ 1941-45 and GOC Home Forces 1942-45. Regular soldier; b. Timaru, NZ, 26 Jun 1890.

<sup>8</sup> At this time, 678,000 Australians out of a population of seven millions, were in the armed forces. This accounted for 26 per cent of the total male labour force, and another 14 per cent were engaged on munitions and other war production. This left only 60 per cent of the country's male labour available for normal production and distribution. Under these conditions Australia was required to sustain her own effort, to supply the Americans in the S.W.P.A. numbering some 380,000 men, with 90 per cent of their needs, and to export food to Britain, America and India. Her economy was strained to the limit, and led to the impending reduction in the armed forces referred to above.

Naval Board recommendation being endorsed by the Defence Committee) that 10 of the 22 frigates approved for construction should be cancelled, entailing an estimated saving of £5,400,000 plus equipment already ordered for the 10 frigates; and that the construction of three Landing Ships Tank should be undertaken at an estimated cost of £400,000 each. Exclusive of this cruiser and destroyer, but inclusive of the L.S.T's, the manning demands for ships already approved entailed a greater manpower intake into the navy than was then allowed. As stated above, the monthly intake into the three Services was on a basis of 5,000—3,000 men and 2,000 women. Of these the navy received a total of only 150. The army had 1,475 (550 and 925 women) and the air force 3,375 (2,350 and 1,025).

In a submission to the Advisory War Council—"a Review of the War Effort in the light of the Strategical Situation"—on 21st March 1944, the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Royle, referring to the "increasing naval character of the war in the Pacific", had said that Australia's best and simplest contribution to the Allied offensive would be an increase in her naval strength, and "for the addition of 4,000-5,000 to the strength of the R.A.N. we could man one aircraft carrier, one or two more cruisers, and six destroyers, if these ships could be made available by the United Kingdom". He suggested that it would be a very appropriate gesture if Mr Curtin, during his visit to London, made an offer that Australia would man such a force. Curtin, however, withheld a decision pending submission by the Chiefs of Staff of a review which the Government had suggested.

At a meeting of the War Cabinet on 3rd May it was approved (though implementation of the decision was deferred pending consultation with the Prime Minister in London) that the monthly intake of men into the navy should be increased by 200 from 1st May 1944 to 31st December 1944—at the expense of the army and air force, whose figures would be reduced by 130 and 70 respectively. The increased navy allocation was to "provide for the manning of all present naval commitments except the cruiser and destroyer whose construction was authorised by the War Cabinet on 4th April".<sup>9</sup>

Re-allocation of the monthly intake of 3,000 men and 2,000 women into the Services would be navy 350 (300 men and 50 women); army 1,345 (420 men and 925 women); air force 3,305 (2,280 men and 1,025 women). The War Cabinet noted that non-Government members of the Advisory War Council favoured adoption of the proposal to man a force of ships from the Royal Navy, but did not record any decision on this proposal in view of the consideration being given to it by Mr Curtin in the United Kingdom. It recorded, however, that it felt that

it would be definitely to the advantage of Australia if these ships could be obtained on transfer from the Royal Navy, but this conclusion was subject to the express condition that modern ships would be transferred. It also felt that if it were possible to obtain the transfer of such vessels from the Royal Navy as a gift and on condition that Australia manned them, a reallocation of manpower between the Services could

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<sup>9</sup> War Cabinet Minute 3523, 3rd May 1944.

be effected to provide the additional personnel requisite for their manning without necessarily entailing the return of the personnel serving overseas, although having regard to the overall manpower position, their return would be of material assistance.

On 18th May Curtin sent a telegram to the Government in the terms of his announcement to the British Government at Chequers on the 21st—that the Australian Navy would be maintained “at its existing strength, plus construction already approved”. The War Cabinet thereupon confirmed its decision of 3rd May to “provide for the manning of all present naval commitments except the cruiser and destroyer”.

Meanwhile, in London, an offer was made to Curtin by Churchill that: “If the Australian Government could see their way to provide the personnel, the Admiralty would be most willing to turn over to Australia an aircraft carrier and one or more cruisers.” An Admiralty memorandum on this subject, furnished to Curtin, suggested that the “one or more” cruisers should be of the Tiger class (ship’s company 850), and the aircraft carrier a light fleet carrier of the *Colossus* class (ship’s company 700, Naval Air Arm 800, total 1,500).

In the event this offer hung fire for twelve months because of the Australian manpower problem until, in June 1945, the War Cabinet approved a recommendation by the Advisory War Council that “in view of the overwhelming American and British naval strength in the Pacific and the acuteness of the Australian manpower position generally, the proposal should not be proceeded with as a war project”.<sup>1</sup>

The manpower position was the overriding factor, and the decision of the War Cabinet on 3rd May that the intake into the navy should be such as to “provide for the manning of all present naval commitments except the cruiser and destroyer” fixed the position of the navy at its then existing strength and size. It was a matter in which the Government and the Chief of the Naval Staff were at variance, and one in which Admiral Royle felt very strongly. But despite his representations over the months of 1944, and his efforts to build up the navy both in men and ships, he was—to his bitter disappointment—defeated by the growing demands for manpower in an Australian economy in which not only immediate and urgent projects but the problems of an approaching post-war era made themselves increasingly felt.

Not only the British offer of ships for Australian manning went by the board in the tide of events. The cruiser and destroyer of which the construction was approved, and the three L.S.T.’s which were to substitute for the ten frigates, also were overwhelmed in the rising flood of victory which now made with unexpected speed in the Pacific. It was towards that victory that the British were increasingly anxious that they should play a major part.

In this the question of timing entered largely. British plans for operations in Burma were conditioned by the availability of forces, and this

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<sup>1</sup> War Cabinet Minute 4241, 6th June 1945.

availability was itself governed by the progress of the war in Europe and the speed with which men and equipment could be transferred from that theatre to South-East Asia, where three main operations were envisaged: the clearing of northern Burma (CHAMPION); a seaborne and airborne attack on Rangoon (VANGUARD); and a large-scale variant of CULVERIN. The program had a narrow margin of time. As John Ehrman put the position in *Grand Strategy*:<sup>2</sup>

For the British role in South-East Asia to be effective, Malaya—including Singapore—and Burma must have been recaptured by the spring of 1946, before the anticipated end of the war against Japan. The Joint Planners estimated that some six months must elapse between the launching of CULVERIN and the recapture of Singapore, which provided the final justification of the operation. CULVERIN must therefore begin immediately after the south-west monsoon of 1945. Similarly, the clearance of Burma, and the reassembly of the resources for CULVERIN was reckoned to take six months from the time that VANGUARD was launched against Rangoon. The date for VANGUARD must therefore be in or before March 1945. If that program could be maintained, the British role in South-East Asia would be justified. If not, there was a strong case for transferring the main effort to the Pacific before it was too late.

Time, for the British in the war against Japan, was also pressing in the Pacific. On 4th July 1944, Curtin sent a telegram to the United Kingdom Government saying that the growing pace of MacArthur's advance might remove the necessity for large Commonwealth military operations, but stressing the general's weakness at sea, which only the British could remedy. This presented an ideal opportunity for the employment of a naval task force which could worthily represent Britain in the Pacific, and which would be received with enthusiasm in Australia. The necessary resources would be made available, but immediate action was required if it was to be effective.

Impressed by this, the British Chiefs of Staff proposed to Churchill, in conjunction with the plans for South-East Asia, that all units of the British Fleet not needed there should be sent at once to the Pacific to form a task force with the Australians and New Zealanders. Their proposal was accepted, as an alternative, on 9th August, and on the 18th a telegram including the proposal for the use of the British Fleet in the Pacific was sent to Washington. After outlining the plans for South-East Asia, the telegram continued:

We are now building up a strong fleet in the Bay of Bengal, the bulk of which, including our newest battleships, will not be required for the operations outlined above in the South-East Asia Theatre. It is our desire in accordance with H.M. Government's policy that this fleet should play its full part at the earliest possible moment in the main operations against Japan wherever the greatest naval strength is required, and thereafter its strength should be built up as rapidly as possible.

This fleet by mid-1945 will probably comprise 4 battleships of the *King George V* class, 6 fleet carriers, 4 light fleet carriers, 15 escort carriers, 20 cruisers, 40-50 fleet destroyers, 100 escorts and a considerable fleet train, the whole constituting a force which could make a valuable contribution in the crucial operations leading to the

<sup>2</sup> Vol V, p. 494.

assault on Japan. This fleet built up as fast as possible would operate under United States command.

If for any reason United States Chiefs of Staff are unable to accept the support of the British Fleet in the main operations (which is our distinct preference) we should be willing to discuss an alternative. The suggestion that we would make in this event is the formation of a British Empire task force under a British Commander, consisting of British, Australian, and New Zealand land, sea, and air forces, to operate in the South-West Pacific area under General MacArthur's supreme command. This alternative, if decided upon, would still enable the British Fleet to be well placed to reinforce the U.S. Pacific Fleet if this should later be desired.

The telegram sought an early expression of the views of the United States Chiefs of Staff—urgency being dictated by the logistic problems entailed, "including the development of the necessary base facilities".

Once again Time now took a hand in this matter of British strategy in the Far East. The above telegram was sent on 18th August, three and a half weeks before the opening of the OCTAGON Conference at Quebec on 12th September. The opinion that Germany would be defeated by the end of 1944 had grown stronger throughout the year, and formed the basis for many of the plans for the Far East. It entered largely into the British plans for South-East Asia, dependent as these were on the transfer of forces from Europe. The hope persisted, though with diminution, throughout the OCTAGON Conference. By the end of September it had disappeared, and it seemed certain that Germany would survive into the winter and possibly into 1945. The consequences did not seriously affect the main strategy for the West, which unrolled at a slower pace; but they affected the relations and balance of power between the victors. This was serious for the British, who had planned to reach the climax of their effort in 1944, and thereafter could only decline within an alliance whose own foundations were shifting.<sup>3</sup> "Octagon" is the last of the great series of Anglo-American conferences which formulated the grand strategy. In 1945, the meetings of the three Allies were concerned increasingly with diplomatic affairs, in which, as in the conduct of the war, the British influence was no longer so great."<sup>4</sup>

On the voyage over to Canada in *Queen Mary* for the OCTAGON Conference, Churchill cogitated on this question of the end of the German war, and at a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff on 8th September warned them against basing their plans on an imminent German collapse. This affected the operations in South-East Asia, the clearing of northern Burma (CAPITAL, which title had now replaced that of CHAMPION) and the sea-borne attack on Rangoon (now called DRACULA instead of VANGUARD), since, as Churchill said:

<sup>3</sup> "I was also glad to record that although the British Empire had now entered the sixth year of the war it was still keeping its position, with a total population, including the Dominions and Colonies, of only seventy million white people. Our effort in Europe, measured by divisions in the field, was about equal to that of the United States. This was as it should be, and I was proud that we could claim equal partnership with our great Ally. Our strength had now reached its peak, whereas our Ally's was ever increasing." Churchill, discussing his opening remarks at the first plenary meeting of "Octagon" on 13th September. *The Second World War*, Vol VI (1954), pp. 132-3.

<sup>4</sup> Ehrman, Vol V, p. 506.

all these tasks called for men and material, and there were not enough in South-East Asia. The only place they could come from was Europe. . . . Rangoon lies forty miles up a winding estuary, complicated with backwaters and mud banks. The monsoon starts in early May, and we should therefore have to attack by April 1945 at the latest. Was it yet safe to start weakening our efforts in Europe?<sup>5</sup>

These considerations no doubt influenced Churchill. He was determined that the British should play their full and equal part in the liberation of Asia, and regain on the field of battle their rightful possessions in the Far East; and not have them handed back at the peace table. And he now felt

our main contribution must obviously be on the sea and in the air. Most of our Fleet was now free to move eastwards, and I resolved that our first demand on our American Allies should be for its full participation in the main assault on Japan.

At the first plenary meeting of the Quebec Conference on 13th September, Churchill offered the British Main Fleet to take part in the major operations against Japan under United States supreme command; Roosevelt said that the British fleet was no sooner offered than accepted—thus overruling the opinion of his own naval commander-in-chief, Admiral King. Admiral Cunningham, the First Sea Lord, in recalling this incident, remarked:

Mr Churchill led off with a good review of the war in general, and, somewhat to the surprise of Brooke, Portal and myself, ended by offering the British main fleet for operations against Japan in the central Pacific in cooperation with the American Fleet. Mr Roosevelt at once replied: 'No sooner offered than accepted.' Remembering the Prime Minister's strongly expressed desire that our fleet should be used for the more limited purpose of assisting to regain Singapore, Malaya, North Borneo and other British possessions from the Japanese, I was naturally delighted. . . . At the same time, I was well aware of Admiral Ernest King's rooted aversion to our fleet operating with the American in its drive towards Japan proper.<sup>6</sup>

King's reluctance to accept the British Fleet in the central Pacific was manifested in a day-long discussion of the conference on 14th September, but he lost the day, which closed with the Combined Chiefs of Staff agreeing that the British Fleet should participate in the main operations against Japan in the Pacific, and that the method of its employment would be decided from time to time, according to circumstances.

The decision entailed a big supply responsibility for Australia. Curtin informed the British Government of the complete cooperation of his Government in the provision of facilities, but warned that the heavy pressure of other commitments would impose limits on what could be done. Advice from the Admiralty indicated that the main force would arrive in Australia between December 1944 and July 1945; that there would be a fleet train comprising all types of supply, repair, and hospital and accommodation ships; that Royal Navy personnel would total 120,000 (29,000 being shore based) by July 1945, and that of this total 47,000 (1,200 being shore based) would arrive by January 1945.

<sup>5</sup> Churchill, Vol VI, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 611.

A Joint Administrative Planning Sub-Committee was set up to examine the potentialities of Australia as a base for Royal Navy forces. It comprised members of the three Services, and representatives of the Department of Supply and Shipping, Department of Munitions, Allied Works Council, Division of Import Procurement, Department of War Organisation of Industry, Department of Aircraft Production, Rationing Commission, Food Control, the Maritime Services Board of New South Wales, and the Postmaster-General's Department. The sub-committee's report was presented in November 1944. Regarding Royal Navy food requirements, it remarked that since July 1917 Australia had, through the R.A.N. administration, been supplying processed foodstuffs to Admiralty Yards in Asia and South Africa "but the quantities of such goods have naturally increased. The provision of food supplies under the Naval Outline Plan was therefore an enlargement of these former supply activities." The report recommended "that except for a few minor items not physically available in Australia, the Admiralty food requirements should be met from Australian resources—the total estimated value of supplies to the end of 1945 being £10,657,000".<sup>7</sup>

This was something less than half the estimated value of the assistance which the sub-committee recommended should be provided for the Royal Navy forces in the period ending December 1945. The total figure of £21,158,000 was made up of: ship maintenance and repair, refitting and docking (£2,000,000); aircraft assembly, maintenance and repairs (£130,000); works projects, minimum bill (£3,843,000); food (£10,657,000); medical and dental stores (£262,000); naval stores (£771,000); clothing and related items (£250,000); canteen stores, non-food (£410,000); Supply Establishment personnel, direct employment of approximately 3,000 Australian civilians in R.N. stores (£1,000,000); machine tools (£216,000); small marine craft (£684,000); vehicles and automotive equipment (£870,000); communications equipment (£65,000).<sup>8</sup> The Australian manpower commitment to meet the foregoing would be approximately 4,500—4,020 men and 480 women.

In the morning of 22nd November 1944 the British Pacific Fleet was formed, and Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser struck his flag in the cruiser *Caradoc* at Trincomalee as Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, and hoisted it in the gunboat *Tarantula*<sup>9</sup> as Commander-in-Chief, British

<sup>7</sup> The values of supplies of various categories of foodstuffs to 31st December 1945, which the sub-committee recommended should be provided from Australian resources were: Fresh vegetables—£565,000; other fresh provisions (meat, butter, bacon, etc.)—£4,317,000; dry provisions—£3,499,000; essential messing items required by N.A.A.F.I. for R.N. Victualling—£1,822,000; sundry canteen items (foodstuffs) required by N.A.A.F.I.—£151,000; confectionery—£303,000.

<sup>8</sup> These were not final figures. For example, on 9 January 1945 the War Cabinet (Min. 3980) authorised the construction with Australian manpower and materials of R.N. Works projects to a total estimated cost of £5,562,000; and on the same day (Min. 3981) approved "that Australia accept as a commitment the supply to R.N. forces of small craft (excluding engines) to a total estimated value of approximately £2,852,600". At the same time the attention of the U.K. authorities was drawn to the fact "that while Australia is prepared to accept a commitment as in (a) above, the production of small craft for R.N. forces will delay for some months the release of skilled workers urgently required for housing, ship repair, and other high priority needs. And that, therefore, the U.K. authorities should consider whether there is any means by which Australia could be relieved of some of this commitment."

<sup>9</sup> HMS *Tarantula*, gunboat (1915), 625 tons, one 6-in gun, 14 kts.

Pacific Fleet. At the same time the flag of Vice-Admiral Sir Arthur Power as Vice-Admiral and Second-in-Command, Eastern Fleet, was struck in the battle cruiser *Renown* and hoisted in the *Caradoc* as Commander-in-Chief East India Station. The appointment of Vice-Admiral Eastern Fleet lapsed, and the ships which remained in the Indian Ocean under Admiral Power formed the East Indies Fleet. The squadron numbers allocated to the two fleets were: Pacific Fleet, 1st Battle Squadron, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Cruiser Squadrons; East Indies Fleet, 3rd Battle Squadron, 5th Cruiser Squadron.

On the morning of 2nd December the flag of Admiral Fraser as Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet was transferred to the battleship *Howe*, which left Trincomalee for Australia with an escort of four destroyers, and reached Fremantle on 10th December. Three days later the flag of Vice-Admiral Sir Bernard Rawlings, as Vice-Admiral Commanding 1st Battle Squadron and Second-in-Command, British Pacific Fleet, was hoisted in the battleship *King George V* at Colombo. It was not until 4th February 1945 that the main body of the Fleet, comprising *King George V*, four fleet carriers, three cruisers, and 10 destroyers, arrived in Fremantle.

Meanwhile, in the South-West Pacific, the Royal Australian Naval Squadron, as TF.74, continued to play its part in shortening the road towards Japan and the war's end.



## CHAPTER 16

### PREFACE TO THE PHILIPPINES

ON 12th August 1944 organised resistance ceased on Guam with the capture of the last Japanese command post of General Obata. The Philippine Sea and the air over it, and the islands of Saipan, Tinian and Guam were now under American control. In losing the Marianas the Japanese suffered a mortal blow. This was recognised in Japan, and on 18th July, the day the loss of Saipan was publicly announced, Tojo, who had assumed office as Prime Minister, War Minister, and Minister for Home Affairs on 17th October 1941, resigned with his entire Cabinet. He was succeeded by General Kuniaki Koiso.

Time had been telescoped in a way unexpected by either side. In less than three years the Allies had achieved

what almost everyone on the morrow of Pearl Harbour thought would take at least five and possibly ten. The second Japanese offensive, in 1942, had been thrown back at the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway. A long and bitter struggle for Guadalcanal had become the starting point for capturing the rest of the Solomons, while South-West Pacific forces secured the Papuan Peninsula, and from both sides massive air and naval attacks neutralised the island fortress of Rabaul. The Gilberts and Marshalls and the recovery of lost Aleutian islands followed in quick succession, so that by early 1944 all was ready for a swift advance along Dutch New Guinea and into the Marianas. New techniques, new weapons, new methods had been worked out.<sup>1</sup>

That "swift advance along Dutch New Guinea" had materialised, and in September 1944 another adjustment of Time's telescope trained on Japan as the Allies' target, further foreshortened the road ahead.

In 1944 the British were not the only ones with internal differences regarding future strategy in the Japanese war. In the middle of the year there was a deadlock in the Joint Chiefs of Staff between a MacArthur plan for the reconquest of the Philippine Islands, and a King-Nimitz plan for a Marianas-Formosa-China strategy, bypassing the Philippines—though the Japanese were then placing the naval plan in jeopardy by their southward advance from Hankow in mainland China, which was denying the Allies friendly Chinese shores. These differences were resolved in August 1944, when Roosevelt, on an inspection tour of the Pacific, summoned MacArthur to Honolulu to discuss plans for the immediate future directly with himself and Nimitz. The debate, centring on the question should or should not the Philippines—or at least Luzon—be bypassed, was carried on between Nimitz and MacArthur. "Only these two talked; the President and the others listened."<sup>2</sup> Nimitz's first consideration was the severing of Japanese lines of communication southward, and he was inclined to believe that taking Formosa was the way to do that. MacArthur's case was

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<sup>1</sup> Morison, Vol VIII, p. 402.

<sup>2</sup> Morison, *Leyte* (1958), p. 10, Vol XII in the series.

that both national honour and sound strategy required the liberation of the Philippines as the next step; and he converted his listeners to this view in an able and eloquent presentation. It was agreed "that the Philippines should be recovered with ground and air power then available in the Western Pacific, and that Japan could be forced to accept our terms of surrender by the use of sea and air power without an invasion of the Japanese homeland".

At the OCTAGON Conference in September, a timetable of operations worked out by Joint Chiefs of Staff planners and General MacArthur's representative, was presented. It was:

15th September, South-West Pacific forces occupy Morotai; Central Pacific forces occupy Peleliu [in the Palau Islands] on 5th October; occupy Yap, with Ulithi to follow. 15th October, South-West Pacific forces occupy Talaud Islands; 15th November, land at Sarangani Bay, Mindanao; 20th December, at Leyte. South-West Pacific and Central Pacific forces then combine to occupy either (1) Luzon to secure Manila by 20th February, or (2) Formosa and Amoy on the China coast by 1st March 1945.<sup>3</sup>

It was Admiral Halsey who initiated the readjustment of the target sights outlined above. Preliminary to the operations listed in the OCTAGON timetable, he took TF.38 from Eniwetok on 28th August to bomb Yap, the Palau Islands, Mindanao and the Bonin Islands, to destroy Japanese air forces which might contest the forthcoming attacks on Morotai and Peleliu. The strikes on the Palaus on 6th-8th September and on Mindanao on the 9th and 10th of the month were unopposed, and in consequence Halsey cancelled later strikes, scheduled for Mindanao, and instead struck the Visayan Islands in the central Philippines on the 12th and 13th. In the Visayas the American airmen, again unopposed, destroyed some 200 enemy aircraft and sank many ships.<sup>4</sup> This succession of unopposed air attacks suggested to Halsey that the Japanese air forces were now ineffective,<sup>5</sup> and at noon on 13th September he recommended to Nimitz that the Palau, Yap, Morotai and Mindanao landings be cancelled as unnecessary, and that troops intended for these operations, and TF.38, be made available to MacArthur for an immediate seizure of Leyte.

It was too late to cancel Morotai. MacArthur was then in U.S.S. *Nashville* on the way to that target, but his Chief of Staff at Hollandia, General Sutherland, who received the Halsey recommendation passed on to MacArthur by Nimitz, knowing his chief's mind, told Nimitz and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 14th September that if Halsey's recommendations were

<sup>3</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff to MacArthur and Nimitz 9th September, 1944.

<sup>4</sup> Morison, Vol XII, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> This conclusion was not entirely correct. The Japanese air forces were being held back in readiness for the major landings that *Imperial General Headquarters* expected shortly. The Japanese accepted the punishment and losses entailed in this conservation of their air strength, as they suffered the pinpricks of Eastern Fleet air and surface bombardments without being diverted from their policy of conserving their fleet for the decisive encounters. As the British Naval Historian, Captain S. W. Roskill, records in *The War At Sea*, Vol III, Part II, p. 202: "It is indeed now plain that even a full-scale amphibious operation across the Bay of Bengal, such as the Supreme Commander had long wished to carry out, would not have induced the Japanese to divert any appreciable strength from the Pacific, where at this time they were very hard-pressed."

adopted, General MacArthur would invade Leyte on 20th October. Nimitz agreed, but felt that the Palau operation should be carried out in order to secure an air base and anchorage. On 15th September the Halsey-Nimitz-MacArthur agreement was presented to the OCTAGON Conference at Quebec, was accepted, and within 90 minutes of its receipt there MacArthur and Nimitz had received instructions to execute the Leyte operation—target date 20th October, cancelling the three previously approved landings at Yap, the Talaud Islands and Mindanao. The directives subsequently issued to them were:

Admiral Wilkinson's Yap Attack Force, the XXIV Army Corps, then loading or at sea, to be assigned to General MacArthur to land at Leyte 20th October. All shipping used in the Palau operation, after unloading, to be sent to South-West Pacific ports to help VII Amphibious Force to lift General Krueger's Sixth Army to Leyte. All fire support ships and escort carriers used in the Palau operation to be assigned temporarily to Admiral Kinkaid, Commander Seventh Fleet, to help to cover Leyte. Ulithi to be seized promptly as an advanced fleet base.

As will be seen from the above directives, no Australian troops were to be used in the Leyte operation. Australia was, however, to be represented by ships and men of the Royal Australian Navy in TF.74, the Landing Ships Infantry, and units of the Survey Group; and by one ship of the Royal Navy—H.M.S. *Ariadne*.<sup>6</sup>

## II

Throughout August after the Sansapor operation, H.M.A.S. *Shropshire*, wearing Commodore Collins' broad pennant as Commodore Commanding TF.74, was the only Australian ship in that force. *Australia* and *Warramunga* proceeded to Sydney for docking and overhaul on 22nd July, and *Arunta* followed them on 3rd August. For most of the month the force, based on Seeadler Harbour in the Admiralties, consisted of *Shropshire*, U.S. Ships *Nashville*, *O'Bannon*, *Hopewell*, *Taylor*,<sup>7</sup> *Nicholas*, and *Bush*, and the fast minelayer H.M.S. *Ariadne*, which was serving as an assault troop carrier, attached for training and exercising. A number of the American ships of TF.75 were also absent in Australia for upkeep and recreation prior to the forthcoming operations, and quite a fleet left Sydney on the 26th of the month to resume duty in northern waters—*Australia*, *Phoenix*, *Boise*, *Arunta*, *Warramunga*, *Hutchins*, *Daly*, *Beale*, *Bache*, *Abner Read*, *Mullaly* and *Ammen*—and arrived at Seeadler Harbour in the forenoon of 1st September. Here Task Group 75.2 was formed, comprising *Australia* (to which Collins transferred his broad pennant on 3rd September), *Shropshire*, *Arunta*, *Warramunga*, *Mullaly* and *Ammen*, as part of TF.75—Rear-Admiral Berkey, U.S.N.—the close support and covering force for the forthcoming Morotai operation.

The over-all plan for future operations in the South-West Pacific, called

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<sup>6</sup> HMS *Ariadne*, British minelayer (1944), 2,650 tons, six 4.7-in guns, 40 knots.

<sup>7</sup> *Hopewell*, *Taylor*, US destroyers (1942-43), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

for a base to provide land-based direct air support, to accommodate light naval forces capable of preventing enemy reinforcement by small craft, and to ensure flank protection for further operations to the north. The need was for an area as close to the Philippines as possible but within fighter aircraft range of the recently acquired Cape Sansapor. Such an area was provided by Halmahera and its adjacent islands, which barred the direct route from Dutch New Guinea to the Philippines, and flanked any movement west or south-west towards Borneo and Java. Northern Halmahera, strongly held by Japanese variously estimated at between 25,000 and 31,000 troops, possessed a number of airfields developed by the Japanese. Their capture and retention would require a large force and it was decided to bypass the main island and capture Morotai, an island off the northern tip of Halmahera, believed to be garrisoned by only 250 men. This would not only fulfil the requirements of projected operations to the north, but would also isolate the Japanese on Halmahera, who were based mainly on the north-east coast at Galela, 36 miles by sea from Morotai.

D-day for the Morotai attack was set for 15th September; and the seizure of Palau by Central Pacific forces was timed simultaneously. General Krueger was designated to direct the offensive with Morotai Task Force, whose major combat units were Headquarters XI Corps, the 31st Infantry Division, and the 126th R.C.T. of the 32nd Infantry Division. Ground forces totalled 40,105, and air force units 16,915. The naval forces for the operation were concentrated as Task Force 77 under Rear-Admiral Barbey, Commander VII Amphibious Force. They comprised an escort carrier group—TF.77.1—of six escort carriers and eight destroyers; the Close Support and Covering Force, TF.75, as detailed above; White Beach Attack Group of 37 ships including destroyers, destroyer transports, L.C.I's, L.S.T's, L.C.T's and H.M.A.S. *Kanimbla*; Red Beach Attack Group of 66 ships of the same categories as those in the White Beach group—and H.M.A.S. *Manoora*; and four reinforcement groups. Barbey commanded the White Beach group in flagship U.S.S. *Wasatch*;<sup>8</sup> Fechteler, in flagship U.S.S. *Hughes*, commanded the Red Beach group. The task organisation of the Close Support and Covering Force was: TG.75.1, cruisers *Phoenix* (flag of Rear-Admiral Berkey), *Nashville*, *Boise*, and destroyers *Hutchins*, *Beale*, *Bache*, *Daly*, *Abner Read*, *Bush*; TG.75.2, cruisers *Australia*, *Shropshire*, and destroyers *Arunta*, *Warramunga*, *Mullaly* and *Ammen*; and TG.75.3, a detached cruiser force comprising *Nashville*, *Abner Read* and *Bush*, whose mission while detached was to carry General MacArthur on a tour of inspection.

In the interval since the three Australian Landing Ships Infantry had been together at the Hollandia landings and *Manoora* had taken part in the Wakde-Sarmi operation, she and *Westralia* had enjoyed brief spells in Sydney. *Westralia*, who berthed alongside Garden Island on 16th May

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<sup>8</sup> *Wasatch*, US amphibious force command ship (1944), 7,234 tons.

for refitting, remained in Sydney until 3rd July. On 31st May, she completed her first year in commission as an L.S.I., and Commander Knight commented:

During this period 310 officers and 5,500 other ranks have been trained in amphibious warfare, and 907 officers and 16,598 men transported in and to the forward areas. Also a large number of vehicles and 25,460 tons of military equipment were landed at various staging points, handled mostly by the ship's landing craft. On the occasions of the Hollandia and Arawe operations *Westralia* was the flagship of the transport task units concerned. 35,000 miles were steamed. This record shows the importance of the contribution made to the successes achieved in the South-West Pacific area. I feel that the Ship's Company have discharged their duty in a most commendable manner, which has often called forth praise from the senior officers under whose orders the ship has been operating.<sup>9</sup> . . . I am happy to have included in the complement the 2nd AIF Ship's Detachment which has proved a very definite asset and has contributed greatly to the general efficiency shown in all the operations in which the ship has participated.

From Sydney, *Westralia* proceeded to Bougainville, where she spent six weeks—until 24th August—training 342 officers and 3,888 enlisted men of the American 37th Division in amphibious warfare. During September, at Aitape, she trained a further 486 officers and 8,669 enlisted men of the American Army in amphibious warfare. She thus took no direct part in the Morotai operation.

*Manoora's* brief spell in Sydney, from 28th June to 19th July, resulted from the necessity to repair the ship's main refrigerator. On her return to New Guinea she was employed in training and transporting troops until 3rd September, when she anchored in Maffin Bay, Wakde Island, and loaded and embarked for the Red Beach attack at Morotai.<sup>1</sup>

*Kanimbla* missed out on a period in Sydney, which port she did not see during 1944. Subsequent to the Hollandia operations, she was employed training and transporting troops in the New Guinea area. On 18th June Commander Shaw, who commanded her from her commissioning as an L.S.I. in June 1943, was succeeded by Lieut-Commander Crawford. Two months later, on 10th August, Commander Bunyan assumed command vice Crawford.

On 1st September *Kanimbla* anchored in Aitape roads. A week was spent in loading, exercising and overhauling gear, and on Saturday, 9th September—on which day Admiral Barbey visited the ship—155 officers and 1,060 men were embarked, "including one captain of the Canadian Army, and one brigadier, one colonel, and two majors of the A.I.F."

<sup>9</sup> Knight brought to the notice of the Naval Board the names of Lieutenant W. N. Swan, RANR, Lieutenant J. K. Skinner, AIF, and Chief Petty Officer E. A. G. Boyd, BEM, 7353, as those of outstanding members of the Ship's Company "and as representative of the Ship's Company as a whole".

<sup>1</sup> Cousin, *Manoora's* commanding officer, remarked in his Letter of Proceedings that "the three weeks in Sydney during the month, in cold weather, proved a veritable God-send. All skin irritations vanished, and the whole of the officers and Ship's Company are in high spirits." He added: "Owing to the arduous nature of the work in Australian Landing Ships (Infantry), particularly during prolonged training periods, it is strongly recommended that at least two weeks break for recreational leave may be granted, if operational duties permit, at least every six months at a port on the mainland, where cooler weather may be experienced." Regarding this, it was noted in Navy Office that Commander Seventh Fleet had laid down for American ships of the Fleet that they would be given a recreation period at least every six months when employed in the New Guinea area.

Next morning *Kanimbla* weighed, and proceeded with the White Beach Force.

That morning, 10th September, TG.75.2 left Seeadler Harbour. At midday it joined with the rest of TF.75, and the force proceeded to Humboldt Bay, where it arrived on 11th September.

*Manoora* spent a week in Maffin Bay loading and exercising, and on the 10th, 130 officers and 1,142 men of the 31st U.S. Division were embarked. Just after 10 a.m. on the 11th *Manoora* weighed and sailed with Red Beach Force to join the White Beach ships, which arrived off Maffin Bay at 10.50 a.m. Weather was fine, with light variable airs, a calm sea, and passing showers. A strong favourable drift necessitated reducing speed through the water, and *Kanimbla*, to maintain station, found "it was only necessary to run on one engine", an experience shared by *Manoora*.

### III

A quarter below, three-quarters above the equator, Halmahera sprawls on the chart like a battered, disfigured starfish bereft of one—the western—lobe. Morotai lies between the tips of the north and north-eastern lobes, in the entrance to the extensive Kau Bay, which those lobes embrace. Lying 700 miles from Wakde and 270 from Sansapor on the one side, Morotai is 220 miles from Menado in Celebes on the other. About 45 miles long and 25 wide, it is generally of mountainous jungle, with a coastal plain about a mile wide to the south. At the base of the narrow Gila Peninsula which, extending to the south-west, is the island's southern extremity, was the uncompleted Japanese Pitu air strip. The landing beaches selected for the operation were on the west coast of the Gila Peninsula—White Beach 1,100 yards south of Pitu strip; and Red Beach extending northwards 500 yards from a point nearly opposite the air strip, to Dorube village. Cape Gila, the tip of the peninsula's finger, points south-westerly, over Mitita Island two miles distant, away across Kau Bay to Galela, 36 miles off on Halmahera's northern lobe, where that island's Japanese occupiers were concentrated.

When the two assault forces of Task Force 77 combined off Maffin Bay on 11th September, TF.75 was in Humboldt Bay completing with fuel and provisions. It sailed thence at 11 p.m. on the 11th, and at 7 a.m. on the 13th, together with the escort carriers of TF.77.1, joined the Attack Force about 100 miles W.N.W. of Biak. From then on, anti-submarine patrol by carrier aircraft, and continuous cover by land based aircraft, were provided. It was virtually impossible to keep secret the movement from Maffin Bay, since Japanese forces were still in possession of the New Guinea coastline immediately west of Wakde. But the convoy route was laid down to pass 40 miles northward of Biak, and beyond sight from Mapia and Asia Islands, where it was believed there were Japanese garrisons. In the period between the occupation of the Sansapor area and the assault on Morotai, South-West Pacific aircraft attacked Japanese bases and shipping in the Halmahera, Ceram and Vogelkop areas with such

effect that enemy air forces there were either destroyed or forced to withdraw. Similarly, the carrier borne aircraft of TF.38, as previously mentioned, effected destruction of enemy aircraft, runways and buildings on Yap, Ulithi, Mindanao and the Palaus.

The approach to Morotai was made without major incident, though there were some individual moments. One of *Manoora*'s ship's company had a rude awakening when, as Cousin recorded in his Letter of Proceedings: "At 0100 13th Able Seaman R. R. Moon,<sup>2</sup> . . . fell over the side (somniaambulism) and was fortunate in being picked up by U.S. destroyer *Stack*."<sup>3</sup> Later that morning the convoy was joined by TF.75, and Bunyan, in *Kanimbla*, remarked that "It was quite a cheering sight to see a few more White Ensigns join the Task Force." Just after this the detached cruiser force, Task Group 75.3, with General MacArthur in *Nashville*, also joined.

Throughout the passage the weather remained fine, with light winds and a calm sea. Steaming at about eight knots, the convoy, with L.S.T's towing the L.C.T's—the tow of 700 miles from Wakde was the longest until then attempted in the Pacific—and with TF.75 ahead, was screened by a circle of 18 destroyers, with another three as picquets ahead and on each bow. TF.77.1, the escort carriers with their destroyers, was astern of the main body.

D-day, Friday, 15th September, Cousin reported, "dawned bright and fine with a very smooth sea. The whole assault operation was carried out according to plan." Bunyan preserved in his Letter of Proceedings a picture of the coming of day as seen from *Kanimbla*:

As dawn broke the vague outlines of the islands of Halmahera and Morotai could be discerned ahead. Mountainous volcanic cones made an imposing scene. The most arresting feature of the landscape was a volcano spouting forth an immense cloud of white smoke and steam which rose high in the air. Tinted by the sun, this great plume caught all eyes.

Entrance to the sheltered water west of Gila Peninsula was made by the armada through the two-miles channel between Cape Gila and Mitita Island. Minesweepers entered the area first to sweep for mines, and were followed by patrol craft for buoying approaches, and for landing craft control. Close support vessels, assault craft and ships for both beaches followed through the narrow entrance in a set and timed order. L.C.T. tows were cast off about seven miles from Cape Gila, and L.C.T's joined their respective groups. *Kanimbla* and *Manoora*, which did not carry immediate assault troops, were stopped to allow the remainder of the force to clear, and then moved to their transport area about a mile and a quarter S.S.E. of Cape Gila. As they waited, "a long line of A.P.D's, L.C.I's and L.C.T's" remarked Bunyan, "passed to starboard making to round Cape Gila for Red and White Beaches where the landing was to be made. These were followed by a second line which passed to port. At 7.30 *Kanimbla* moved towards the Transport Area."

<sup>2</sup> AB R. R. Moon, S7044. HMAS's *Manoora* and *Gladstone*. Of Sydney; b. Sydney, 21 Oct 1924.

<sup>3</sup> *Stack*, US destroyer (1939), 1,500 tons, four 5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

By this time, as seen from *Kanimbla*, "a large heavy pall of black smoke was rising to merge with the clouds". It resulted from a bombardment carried out by *Australia* and *Shropshire* on the landing beach areas. Gun-fire support had been scheduled to cover both the landing areas and near-by possible opposition points, and also to interdict the Japanese main body on Halmahera. This last-mentioned mission was entrusted to Berkey's TG.75.1 of three cruisers and six destroyers—including *Nashville*—and at 5 a.m. the two task groups of the Close Support and Covering Force parted company, Berkey to carry out a bombardment of enemy beach installations, two airfields, and targets of opportunity in Halmahera's Galela Bay area; and Collins to cover the approach to the landing beaches with bombardments of the southern tip of Cape Gila and Mitita Island; and to cover the landing beaches with enfilade fire.

*Warramunga* was the first of the Morotai group to open fire. She and *Arunta* were manoeuvring into position as an anti-submarine screen to the eastward of *Australia* and *Shropshire*, when a barge was sighted close inshore headed towards Cape Lilialamo, half-way along the eastern coast of Gila Peninsula. Collins directed *Warramunga* to engage it, which she did at 8,300 yards opening range at 6.6 a.m. The barge—"60 feet in length with prominent raised stern, small mast amidships and large deckhouse aft, and the numerals 314 painted on the bows"—was driven ashore and destroyed by the gunfire.

*Ammen* and *Mullany* proceeded independently to their bombardment stations south of Cape Gila at 6 a.m., and at 6.30 both ships opened fire, *Ammen* on the tip of the Gila Peninsula, and *Mullany* on Mitita Island. The two cruisers, screened by *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, took up bombardment positions E by S of Cape Gila, *Australia* 2,500 yards from the cape and *Shropshire* 1,700, and opened fire respectively on the White Beach and Red Beach areas at 6.50. In bombardments of approximately fifty minutes each, *Australia* fired 190 8-inch shells and *Shropshire* 161. The targets were well covered, but the narrowness of the peninsula resulted in a hitch in the cruisers' bombardments. Fragments of shell from them were reported as falling close to U.S.S. *Fletcher*, one of four destroyers assigned to covering the landings from the west of the peninsula. As a result, Collins cut short the bombardment by ten minutes of the scheduled time, "since it was obvious by this time that the opposition from shore was non-existent or at the worst of a weak character". In an endorsement to Collins' Action Report of 18th September, Berkey said that the impression that shell fragments were falling near *Fletcher* "was caused by shells detonating in the tops of heavy tropical hardwood trees close to the shore".<sup>4</sup>

The leading assault waves went ashore in L.V.T's (amphibious tractors) brought in by L.C.T's, and landed on the appointed hour at 8.30 a.m. Just before 8 a.m. *Kanimbla* and *Manoora* proceeded from the transport area to their respective beaches. *Kanimbla*, at White Beach with Brigade Headquarters, piped "Lower all boats" at 7.45 a.m. Those on board were

<sup>4</sup> Morison, Vol XII, p. 23.



given a thrill by the activities of dive bombers attacking targets along the beach and inland.

At 8.29 the first wave of our boats made for White Beach, followed three minutes later by *Manoora*'s first wave, headed for Red Beach. At 8.34 our second wave left the ship, followed in four minutes by our third wave. A short while later the heartening news was received that no resistance had been encountered on either Red or White Beaches. As these beaches, however, were of pure coral, landing conditions for the boats were very severe, the troops on some occasions being up to their necks in water.

The nature of the landing ground—sticky mud interspersed with coral heads—constituted the only opposition to the landing. Barbey, in his report on the operation, tells how, at White Beach

the reef was rough going and many men were well over waist deep after leaving landing craft. At Red Beach rather worse conditions prevailed. LVT's all landed, successfully, but some LCI's were caught on coral heads near the reef edge, and men were in shoulder deep water. Others were more successful. Several LCI's were unable to retract and were towed off later in the day.

At the conclusion of its bombardment TG.75.2 assumed cruising disposition at 7.52 a.m., and cruised to the southward of Cape Gila until joined at 9.25 by Berkeley and TG.75.1 from Galela—where in a bombardment of about an hour watched by MacArthur in *Nashville*, fires were started and airfields cratered, against no opposition. On TG.75.1's arrival at Morotai, Admiral Barbey and General Hall (who commanded the assault troops), boarded *Nashville* and reported to General MacArthur. For the rest of the day the combined force cruised to the southward of Cape Gila to furnish gun support to the landing if required. "No enemy air attacks were made," recorded Collins, "and no calls for fire were received." Until 6 p.m. on 16th September the force cruised to the eastward of Morotai in the vicinity of the escort aircraft carriers, and then was released by Barbey and shaped course for Mios Wundi, where it arrived at 7.20 on Monday, 18th September, after an uneventful passage.

Little less than an hour earlier than this, *Kanimbla* and *Manoora*, having successfully completed their Morotai operations, arrived at Humboldt Bay, at 6.30 a.m. on the 18th. Both ships had sailed from Morotai just after 3 p.m. on the 15th after discharging all their equipment and cargo, and proceeded escorted by U.S. destroyer *Stevens*<sup>5</sup> and *PC476*.<sup>6</sup> As they sailed, the Washington news broadcast announced that "General MacArthur's forces had landed on the island of Morotai, north of Halmahera, with little opposition and few casualties. Naval and air units carried out bombardment of enemy installations. No naval or air losses had been suffered."<sup>7</sup>

Thus Morotai fell into Allied hands without a struggle. "Shortly after noon D-day, General Persons [of the American 31st Infantry Division]

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<sup>5</sup> *Stevens*, US destroyer (1943), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

<sup>6</sup> *PC476*, US submarine chaser (1942-44), 280 tons, one-two 3-in guns, 18 kts.

<sup>7</sup> *Kanimbla* report.

established his command post ashore without having heard a shot fired; so far only two Japanese had been found on the island," recorded the U.S. Naval Historian.<sup>8</sup> A feeble Japanese attack the first night ashore was wiped out, and operations resolved themselves into minor patrol actions against small parties of enemy, at a cost to the Americans of 31 killed and 85 wounded. By 4th October the total number of Japanese on the island killed and captured was 117. An estimated 200 were killed in P.T. boat attacks when trying to escape to Halmahera. The rest of the garrison, less than 200, fled to the mountains, and no attempt was made to ferret them out.

The day after the landings, Liberty ships began to arrive with equipment to build an air base. Docks were built, and construction of the air base by U.S. Army engineers and two airfield construction squadrons of the Royal Australian Air Force, though delayed by the boggy nature of the ground and heavy rains, soon went ahead. On 4th October, until which time aircraft from the escort carriers acted in lieu, fighter aircraft could be accommodated and soon afterward medium bombers from Morotai's new Wawama airfield began operating against Mindanao. On 19th October, U.S. Navy Ventura and Liberator bombers arrived. Thus Morotai was able to fulfil its role as an Allied air base in the great operation shortly to mark the American return to the Philippine Islands, and by 20th October, the day of the assault on Leyte, the Morotai airfields were crowded with aircraft ready for a transfer to that island. Morotai also functioned as a P.T. base, which was established on an islet off Red Beach. The boats made nightly patrols which protected Morotai from raids by the Japanese on Halmahera; and another of their functions was that of carrying A.I.B. members to the Talaud and other islands, and withdrawing them when their missions were accomplished.

#### IV

At 8.32 a.m. on 15th September, two minutes after the initial landing at Morotai and some 430 miles to the north-east of that island, marines of the 1st Marine Division landed on Peleliu, in the Palau Islands. Here the story was different from that of Morotai. Some 10,000 Japanese—half of them combat troops—were on the island, and cave strongposts, well protected by coral, sand, and concrete, were almost impervious to bombings and surface bombardments carried out for three days prior to the landings by aircraft from escort carriers, and a fire support group of 5 battleships, 8 cruisers, and 14 destroyers under Rear-Admiral Oldendorf.

As at Morotai, D-day at Peleliu opened "fair with light airs ruffling a calm sea, and few clouds". Landings were to be made on five beaches—White 1 and 2, and Orange 1, 2, and 3—which were adjacent to each other over a one-and-a-half mile stretch of the island's south-west extremity, where the airfield was situated. Little was known by the Americans of the Palau Islands before the landings, and practically all the reconnaissance

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<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol XII, p. 24.

was aerial photographic, from which were compiled 1:20,000-scale maps. But these, because of cloud cover, heavy jungle, and clever Japanese camouflage, were defective, and gave the general impression that Peleliu was low and flat instead of rugged.

Describing the initial assault, the U.S. naval historian says:

The initial wave, boated in LVT(A)s, hit the beaches at 0832, two minutes late. Gunfire, quickly mounting in volume, greeted them from the high ground, from cleverly concealed concrete casements on the left of Beach White 1, and from a battery which enfiladed the entire line of beaches from a tiny, unnamed island south of Beach Orange 3. As the smoke and dust cleared, burning and wrecked LVTs were revealed from White 1 to Orange 3. Waves 2 through 6, boated in LVTs, landed on schedule against mounting resistance, dodging the damaged vehicles.<sup>9</sup>

In the face of such opposition, the anticipated phase line had been only half attained by nightfall, and the marines had lost 201 killed and 901 wounded. Fighting continued briskly for three days, 16th to 18th September, and although it was announced by III Amphibious Force on 12th October that the "assault phase" was at an end, it was not until 25th November that the Peleliu operation was officially "over", after weeks of bitter fighting. Before then, the island of Angaur, six miles southwest of Peleliu, assaulted on 16th September, was subdued. Organised resistance was reported as over on 20th September, but it was not until 23rd October that the final Japanese cave strongholds were overrun.

The Peleliu-Angaur operation demonstrated for the first time the new Japanese tactics of prolonging, if they could not defeat, an amphibious assault. In using these tactics on this occasion, they killed 1,950 Americans and wounded about 8,500—of which numbers 158 and 505 respectively were navy—engaged some 42,000 troops, and for a short while pinned down a formidable naval task force. Some 13,600 Japanese were killed in the process. The two islands were used by the Americans as staging points for ships and aircraft during the rest of the war. Of this operation, the American naval historian wrote:

It would take more arguments than this writer can muster to prove that operation STALEMATE II was necessary, or that the advantages were worth the cost. Admiral Halsey had the right idea; they should have been bypassed when the great strategic step-up was decided upon. The most valuable contribution to victory of this costly operation was to prepare the Army and Marine Corps for what they would experience at Okinawa.<sup>1</sup>

The forthcoming Philippines operations made necessary the acquisition of another group, that of Ulithi Atoll, which would fill the American need of an advanced fleet base. Lying, about 360 miles from each halfway on the direct route from Guam to Peleliu, 830 miles from the Admiralties, and 900 from Leyte, the atoll was to become the hub of naval operations in the western Pacific after September 1944. The American landing, by

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<sup>9</sup> Morison, Vol XII, pp. 37-8.

<sup>1</sup> Morison, Vol XII, p. 47.

the 323rd R.C.T. of the 81st Division, was carried out, unopposed, on 23rd September. What casualties were incurred there resulted from the explosions of mines laid by the Japanese before they withdrew from the atoll, and by midget submarines. These midgets were a new type of "human torpedo" called "Kaiten", which were carried on the deck of a conventional submarine and launched close to the target.

There were, around this period and in the same general area of these island acquisitions, two more, in which the White Ensign played the leading part. In November, the VII Amphibious Force was directed to seize the Mapia group of three small islands lying about 130 miles N.W. of Biak and 360 miles E.S.E. of Morotai, and the similar group of Asia Islands lying about 190 miles west of the Mapias and 180 miles S.E. of Morotai. They were needed for the establishment of weather stations and long range radio aid to navigation—Loran. Admiral Barbey entrusted the mission to H.M.S. *Ariadne*, with landing craft, and three destroyers as support group. *Ariadne* embarked a regiment of the 31st Division at Morotai on 13th November and landed them on Pegun Island in the Mapia group on the 15th. The Japanese, some 200, who had withdrawn to another island, were cleaned out thence by the American troops after a bombardment by the destroyers—at a cost of 17 Americans killed and 30 wounded. *Ariadne* then returned to Morotai, embarked a company of infantry with service troops on 18th November, and landed them without opposition on the Asia group on the 19th. By then, the Americans had returned to the Philippines and were firmly entrenched on Leyte, at the assault on which the Royal Australian Navy played a prominent part.

## V

No Australian land forces took part in the invasion of the Philippines, but those operations entailed their redistribution to a considerable extent. For political reasons the Americans were opposed to land forces other than their own "liberating" the Philippines, in the same way as the British wished themselves to recover Singapore and Malaya, rather than have them handed back after the war was over. MacArthur's problem was one of securing sufficient American troops to carry out the operation.

Of eighteen American divisions that General MacArthur commanded in the third quarter of 1944 six and one-third were employed in the defence of Torokina, Aitape, and the New Britain bases. Other divisions were similarly guarding the bases at Morotai, Biak, Hollandia and Sansapor where Japanese forces were still at large, and three divisions were only on loan from Nimitz. If the policy was continued of seizing air bases and manning a defensive perimeter around them with a force generally greater than the enemy force in the area, MacArthur's advance would soon be halted because his army would be fully engaged defending its bases against "by-passed" Japanese. The reconquest of the Philippines would require more divisions than MacArthur could provide unless he was able to use the large part of his force which was tied down in New Guinea and the Solomons. His solution was to hand over the problem of the by-passed garrisons to Australia.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Long, *The Final Campaigns*, p. 19.

After some discussion, it was arranged that one brigade of Australians would take over on Emirau, Green, Treasury and New Georgia Islands on 1st October 1944; the 6th Division and one brigade would take over in New Guinea on 15th October; the 5th Division in New Britain on 15th November; and the 3rd Division and the 11th Brigade in Bougainville by stages from 15th November to 1st January.

The establishment of the 5th Division in New Britain brought the navy into the picture in operation BATTLEAXE—landing advance units of the division in Jacquinot Bay on 4th November “to complete phase ‘A’ of an operation to land covering forces and to provide a base to service one Australian division for eventual operations in New Britain”.

In August 1944 New Britain was shared between the Americans in the western half, the Japanese in the eastern half, and a few Australian and native guerillas and small parties of Japanese in between these main forces. The main body of the American 40th Division was around Cape Gloucester at the western extremity of the island, with one regimental combat team in the Talasea-Cape Hoskins area on the north coast, and one battalion group at Arawe on the south. The principal Japanese force was concentrated at Rabaul, its major defensive line crossing the north-eastern corner of the Gazelle Peninsula from Put Put on the east to Ataliklikun Bay just west of Rabaul. Small Japanese posts existed on both north and south coasts, those on the south being spaced over about half its length to the vicinity of Cape Dampier.

So placed as to be able to harass these were two A.I.B. groups. On the north coast Captain Robinson, A.I.F., had twelve coastwatchers and about 200 natives with him, while Fairfax-Ross’ southern group was of fifteen coastwatchers and some 200 natives. To Fairfax-Ross was given the task of clearing the Japanese from the south coast as far east as Henry Reid Bay, a distance of 150 miles from the enemy’s westernmost outpost at Montagu Bay. This, with some help from an American patrol from the west, from Allied air attacks on Japanese posts, and from the navy, was successfully accomplished, and when the initial landing of the 5th Division was made by troops of the 6th Brigade at Jacquinot Bay on 4th November, there were no Japanese on the coast south of Henry Reid Bay.

The navy’s contribution to this was a bombardment by *Swan* of Milim, a Japanese strongpost on Wide Bay, midway between Henry Reid Bay and Wide Bay’s southern extremity at Cape Cormoran. This bombardment, on 12th August, was the introduction to his new command of Lieut-Commander Inglis, who previously commanded *Warrego*, and succeeded Bunyan in command of *Swan* on the 9th of the month. The ship was then at Langemak where, on the 10th, N.O.I.C. New Guinea, Captain Armstrong, conducted on board her a discussion with R.A.A.F. and A.I.B. officers regarding the forthcoming operation. When *Swan* sailed for Wide Bay at 10 p.m. on the 10th she had on board Lieut-Commander Mackenzie, who had succeeded Feldt as Supervising Intelligence Officer, “Ferdinand”, and who was familiar with the bombardment area.

*Swan's* bombardment was carried out in conjunction with an air attack by four Beaufort aircraft of the R.A.A.F., and as she approached Wide Bay at 6.25 a.m. on the 12th, bomb explosions could be seen in the Milim area. The ship rounded Kiep Point at 1.15, and opened fire at 3,700 yards, the range being closed when no opposition fire materialised. Various targets were engaged and direct hits obtained in a bombardment which lasted until 10.7 a.m., and in which Mackenzie helped with target identification. Some 340 rounds of 4-inch ammunition was expended. "No opposition was experienced," remarked Inglis in his report of the operation, "though it is thought one rifle shot was heard whilst in area C!" The Japanese for a while abandoned their Milim position, but returned there in strength at the end of September, and remained until again driven out by heavy air attacks on 6th, 7th, and 8th October.

Meanwhile the decision had been reached to establish the 5th Division base at Jacquinot Bay, and early in September H.M.A.S. *Kiama* (Lieutenant Benson<sup>3</sup>) carried there a reconnaissance party of 13 A.I.F. officers, 12 R.A.A.F. officers, 73 other ranks and 10 natives, and herself carried out a survey of the area. The questions for which answers were sought were: Is the area suitable as a base for a divisional task force? Is there a suitable area for the establishment of essential base installations for its maintenance? Can Liberty ships be unloaded by landing craft in a protected anchorage at all seasons?

*Kiama*, with the reconnaissance party and stores for three days, left Lae on 3rd September and anchored off Palmalmal Plantation, Jacquinot Bay, at daylight on the 5th. She was boarded on arrival by Lieutenant Black,<sup>4</sup> of Fairfax-Ross' party, who reported no Japanese in the vicinity, "the last four having been killed on Sunday, 2nd September".<sup>5</sup> *Kiama* anchored and disembarked the reconnaissance party and stores, and her survey was carried out by Lieutenant Gourlay<sup>6</sup>—the results confirming that Liberty ships could service the proposed base. The reconnaissance party was re-embarked on 7th September, and *Kiama* arrived at Lae at 4 p.m. on the 8th. Whilst at Jacquinot Bay Benson received a report from Fairfax-Ross on *Swan's* bombardment of Milim, in which it was estimated that 250 Japanese were killed. "The remnants of this force fled in confusion and have established themselves at Henry Reid Bay in Tol Plantation." Fairfax-Ross said that a bombardment of this area was most desirable, but Benson reported that "owing to insufficient time to obtain approval, it was considered unwise to carry out this operation much as the ship desired to do so".

<sup>3</sup> Capt S. J. Benson, RD; RANR. Served RN 1939-41 (HMS *Moreton Bay*); comd HMAS's *Goonambee* 1942, *Kiama* 1943-45. MHR since 1962. Ship's officer; of Cheltenham, S.A.; b. Cheltenham, 12 Jul 1909.

<sup>4</sup> Capt G. B. Black, MC. 6 Div Fd Cash Office; "Z" and "M" Special Units. Public servant; of Rabaul, TNG; b. Longreach, Qld, 24 Oct 1914.

<sup>5</sup> Benson's report of the operation.

<sup>6</sup> Lt K. R. Gourlay, RANR. HMAS's *Westralia*, *Kybra*, *Adelaide* and *Echuca*; comd HMAS *Deloraine* 1944-45. B. Hobart, 23 Sep 1917.

This reconnaissance was the forerunner to operation BATTLEAXE, in which the navy's role was initiated on 11th October in a request from Brigadier Sheehan,<sup>7</sup> the senior General Staff Officer, First Australian Army, to Captain Armstrong, for a naval escort to protect ships at anchor in Jacquinot Bay from a possible seaborne attack by Japanese using barges from Wide Bay. Armstrong designated *Vendetta* (Lieutenant Cook<sup>8</sup>), *Swan* (Lieut-Commander Hodges<sup>9</sup>), and *Barcoo* (Lieut-Commander C. G. Hill<sup>1</sup>) to afford protection against barge traffic and to carry out any necessary bombardment, and *ML802* (Lieutenant Shortus<sup>2</sup>) and *ML827* (Lieutenant Downs<sup>3</sup>) "to operate with the 5th Division for general duties".

Since her bombardment of Milim in August, *Swan*, while at Wakde on 3rd September, had carried out another brief bombardment "of suspected Japanese positions to the south-east of Cape Sarimi", and had a boiler cleaning and refit period in Sydney. The passage south to that port, recorded Inglis in his report, "proved uneventful except for a somewhat high incidence of seasickness! This was due to the lively motion of the ship whilst meeting a head wind and moderate seas after months of calm weather sailing." While in Sydney the change in command took place, when Hodges succeeded Inglis on 25th September. The ship sailed from Sydney on 21st October and arrived at Madang on the 29th, and joined *Vendetta* and *Barcoo*. The next day the ships were boarded by the First Naval Member, Admiral Royle, who was making a tour of inspection; on 31st October the flotilla, with Commander Morrow, Commander (D) in charge of operations in *Vendetta*, sailed for Langemak.

The voyage across to Jacquinot Bay was uneventful. The ships had in company the transport *Cape Alexander* (6,711 tons) with army units and the Jacquinot Bay Port Directorate embarked, and the destination was reached at 6.35 a.m. on 4th November. Soon afterwards *ML827*—which had escorted the tug *Tancred* towing a pontoon barge to Arawe, and escorted thence a number of landing barges for troop disembarkation at Jacquinot Bay—was sighted. No enemy barges were seen in the careful search made of the foreshore as the ships entered the bay at 7.40 a.m., and came to anchor off Mission Point.

During the three days the ships were at Jacquinot Bay they carried out anti-submarine patrols at the entrance to the bay, and also patrolled in Wide Bay. On 6th November the three ships carried out a bombardment

<sup>7</sup> Maj-Gen E. L. Sheehan, CBE. BM 23 Bde 1940-41; GSO1 11 Div 1942-43; BGS First Army 1943-46. Regular soldier; b. Melbourne, 22 Dec 1898.

<sup>8</sup> Capt W. F. Cook, MVO; RAN. HMAS's *Perth*, *Voyager*, *Nizam*; comd HMAS's *Vendetta* 1944, *Nizam* 1944-45. B. Numurkah, Vic, 20 Oct 1916. (Cook succeeded Mesley on 26th September.)

<sup>9</sup> Lt-Cdr D. W. Hodges, RANR. HMAS's *Perth*, *Stuart*, *Hobart*; comd HMAS's *Lachlan*, *Swan* and *Orara* 1944; served HMAS *Shropshire* 1944-45. Of Kew, Vic; b. Bristol, England, 26 Nov 1909.

<sup>1</sup> Hill assumed command on 16th October.

<sup>2</sup> Lt V. T. Shortus, RANVR. *ML426*, *ML805*; comd *ML429* 1943-44, *ML822* 1944, *ML802* 1944-45. B. Sydney, 21 Aug 1916.

<sup>3</sup> Lt I. F. G. Downs, OBE; RANVR. Coastwatcher, AIB, 1942-43; comd *ML822* 1943-44, *ML827* 1944-45. MHA Papua-New Guinea since 1964. Asst District Officer; of Madang, NG; b. Edinburgh, Scotland, 6 Jun 1915.

of selected targets in Wide Bay, which they entered at 5.15 a.m. Again Mackenzie was in *Swan* to direct the bombardment, and Hill, in his report, said that neither enemy craft nor troops were sighted, but that Mackenzie "was satisfied with the observed fall of shot, and it may be assumed that the targets were found and the enemy positions seriously damaged at least". The naval bombardment was accompanied by a bombing attack carried out by 20 Beauforts.

At noon on 7th November, their mission completed, the three ships sailed for Langemak, where they arrived next day. For the rest of the year 1944 they were engaged escorting, and on routine duties as far west as Morotai. On 21st November *Swan* had another change of command, when Morrow succeeded Hodges, who assumed command of the auxiliary minesweeper *Orara*. For most of December she was at Mios Wundi, and on Christmas Day Morrow recorded:

The ship was "handed over" to the ratings who carried out naval "courtesies" and fulfilled visits and social obligations in an efficient, charming and amusing manner. It is worth noting that a visiting U.S. naval officer was amazed at this normal British practice, and we had difficulty in convincing him that everything would be normal again later.

Meanwhile the changeover from American to Australian troops had been effected in the various areas. On 27th September the headquarters of 23rd Brigade was opened on Green Islands. That of the 3rd Division was opened at Torokina on 6th October. Additional to the landing at Jacquinot Bay, the 36th Battalion took over from the Americans at Cape Hoskins on the north of New Britain, where the first detachment landed on 8th October from the Dutch *Swartenhondt*. On New Guinea, the initial Australian party arrived on 15th September. *Gorgon* left Brisbane with base troops on 4th October, and ships carrying the 6th Division arrived at Aitape at intervals during October, November and December. At Jacquinot Bay development went ahead steadily. A Port Directorate was established, and in his report of 4th December the Naval Intelligence Officer, Jacquinot Bay, could say "Troops are steadily pouring into the area". Unfortunately one of the two motor launches, *ML827*, was lost through running aground in Rondahl Harbour, just east of Waterfall Bay, on 17th November. She was refloated after three days, but was severely damaged. She was taken in tow by a salvage tug, but in the night of the 20th the tow parted, and *ML827* sank. There were no casualties.

## VI

While these operations were taking place in New Guinea, New Britain and Bougainville, the invasion of the Philippines was successfully carried out at Leyte, and the Japanese Navy suffered a crushing defeat in the last line-of-battle action fought in the long-established tradition.

In 1944 MacArthur's headquarters produced a 34-page booklet—printed by a Brisbane newspaper—entitled *To the Philippines*. Addressed to the troops who were to make the landings, it opened with a phrase



which, now that the Allies were on the offensive, was becoming familiar: "You are about to take part in one of the greatest campaigns . . ." Explaining "why we are going into the Philippines", the booklet gave the reasons as "honour", and, "from a cold military standpoint" the strategic importance of the Philippines. It stressed that their more than 7,000 separate islands together have an area only a little smaller than that of the British Isles, and that they occupy a similar position off the coast of Asia to that of England and Ireland off the coast of Europe. Seizure of the Philippines would cut the Japanese supply lines from the Netherlands East Indies, and from Thailand, French Indo-China and the Malay States. Japan would lose all that she had gained in the South-West Pacific, "and the road back to New York and Centerville and Tompkins Corner will lie straight ahead of us at last".

The assault on the Philippines at Leyte was under the supreme command of General MacArthur. He had under his orders land-based Allied Air Forces, S.W.P.A., Lieut-General Kenney; the Sixth Army, General Krueger, Commander Expeditionary Force; and Seventh Fleet, Vice-Admiral Kinkaid, now designated Commander Central Philippines Attack Force. This force was formed from units of the Seventh Fleet, greatly augmented by ships of the Pacific Fleet. Its task, as laid down in Kinkaid's Operational Order No. 13-14 was, by a ships-to-shore amphibious operation, to "transport, protect, land and support elements of the Sixth Army in order to assist in the seizure, occupation, and development of the Leyte area". As the instrument for this task it consisted of some 550 ships including battleships, cruisers, escort carriers, destroyers, destroyer escorts, attack transports, cargo ships, landing craft, survey vessels, mine craft and supply ships.<sup>4</sup>

The Central Philippine Attack Force was divided into the Northern Attack Force (TF.78, Rear-Admiral Barbey's VII Amphibious Force) and the Southern Attack Force (TF.79, Vice-Admiral Wilkinson's III Amphibious Force), with surface and air cover groups, fire support, bombardment, minesweeping and supply groups. The troops for the initial landing were the X Corps: 1st Cavalry Division, 6th Ranger Battalion, 32nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade, 2nd Engineer Special Brigade and 24th Infantry Division (21st R.C.T.); XXIV Corps: 7th Infantry Division, 96th Infantry Division (381st R.C.T.), 77th Infantry Division, 32nd Infantry Division, 20th Armoured Group. Barbey's Northern Attack Force, responsible for landing the X Corps on the western shores of Leyte's San Pedro Bay near Tacloban, was divided into three component parts. Two of these, the Palo Attack Group, TG.78.1 commanded by Barbey, and the San Ricardo Attack Group, TG.78.2, under Rear-Admiral Fechteler,

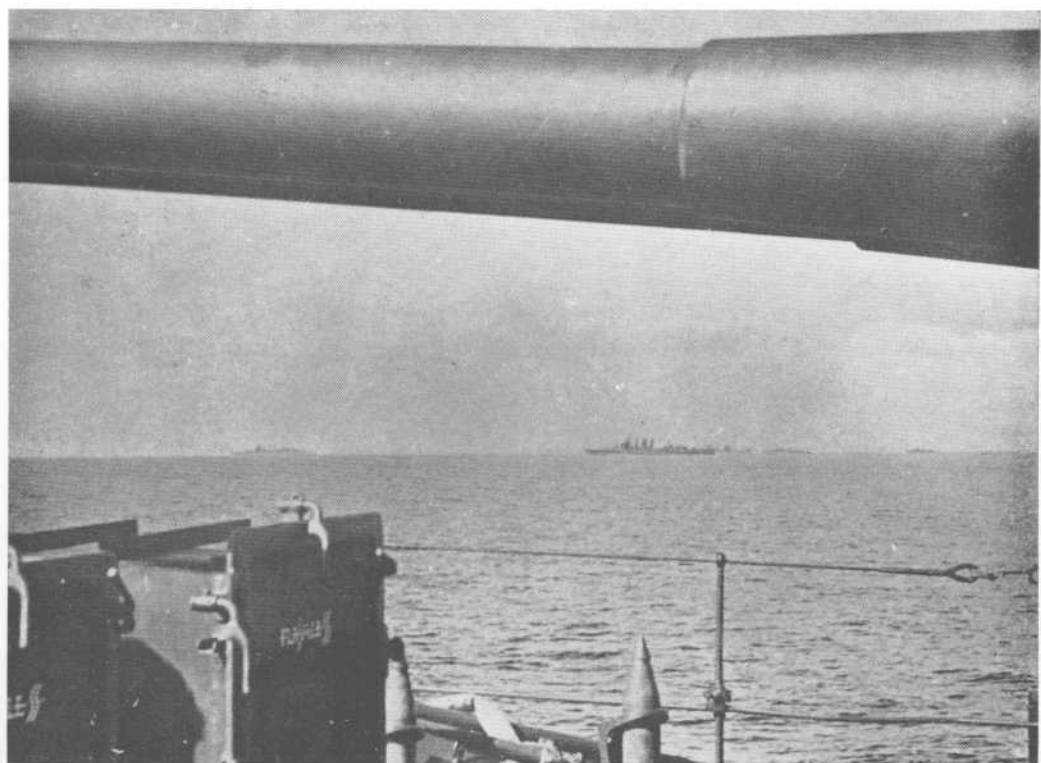
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<sup>4</sup>The approximate size of the main convoy and escorts when all sections had joined up was six old battleships, five heavy cruisers, six light cruisers, 18 escort carriers, one seaplane tender, 86 destroyers, 14 destroyer escorts, five headquarters ships, 46 transports, 14 cargo ships, one hospital ship, 17 destroyer transports, nine landing ships dock, three landing ships infantry, 15 submarine chasers, 44 minesweepers, 238 landing craft, and 18 miscellaneous.



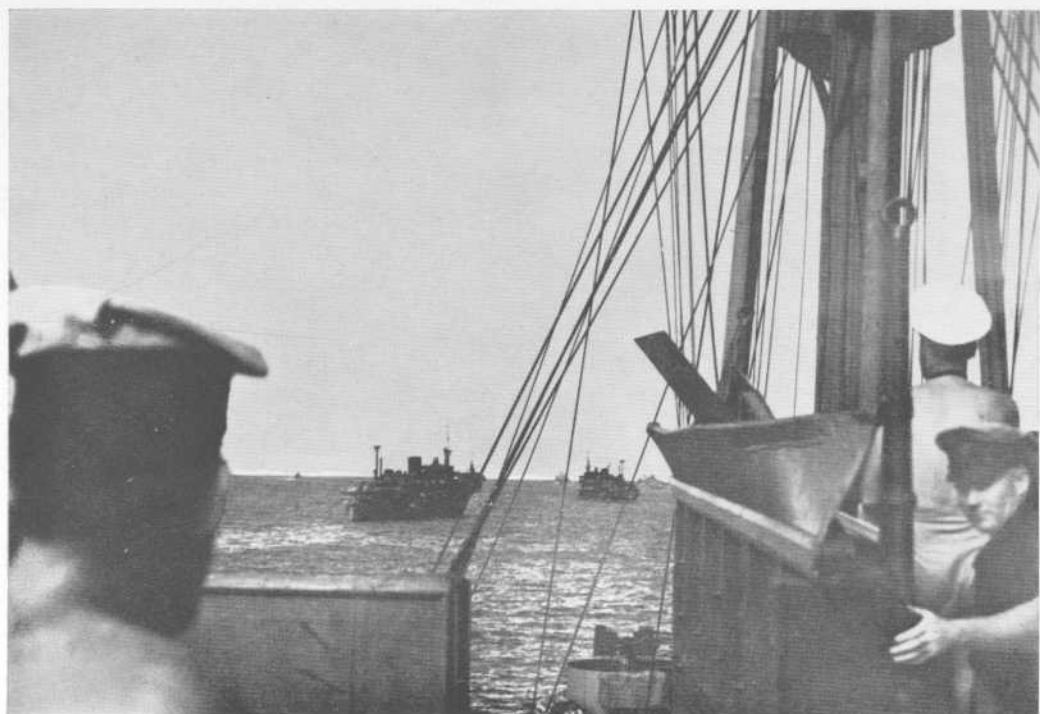
(Argus, Melbourne)

Ratings in H.M.A.S. *Nizam*, 3rd November 1944.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

On board *Arunta* on the way to Morotai, September 1944. *Australia* and *Shropshire* in background.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

The invasion of Leyte, 20th October 1944. On board *Westralia* with *Kanimbla* and *Manoora* ahead.



(U.S. Navy)

Landing craft heading for the beaches at Leyte, 20th October 1944.

landed the 24th Infantry Division and the 1st Cavalry Division respectively on the Red and White Tacloban beaches. The third component, the Panaon Attack Group, TG.78.3, commanded by Rear-Admiral A. D. Struble and including the three Australian L.S.I's *Manoora*, *Westralia*, *Kanimbla*, and the fast minelayer H.M.S. *Ariadne*, landed 2,866 officers and men of the 21st R.C.T. on Green Beach, Panaon Strait area. Close cover was provided for TF.78 by Rear-Admiral Berkey's TG.77.3—cruisers U.S. Ships *Phoenix* (Flag), *Boise*, and H.M.A. Ships *Australia* (broad pendant of Commodore Collins) and *Shropshire*, and destroyers U.S. Ships *Bache*, *Beale*, *Hutchins*, *Daly* and *Killen*,<sup>5</sup> and H.M.A. Ships *Arunta* and *Warramunga*. Fire support unit for the Northern Attack Force was composed of three battleships, *Mississippi*, *Maryland* and *West Virginia*, under the command of Rear-Admiral G. L. Weyler. There was, at this time, another British force (Force X) in the South-West Pacific. A landing ship force, it arrived for service with VII Amphibious Force. But though it was used for training a large proportion of the American troops that carried out the landing, it did not directly participate.

To Wilkinson's TF.79 was assigned the task of landing and establishing the XXIV Corps on the Orange, Blue, Violet and Yellow Beaches between San Jose and Dulag, some ten miles south of Barbey's Red Beach at Palo. The Task Force was divided into Attack Group A, TG.79.1 commanded by Rear-Admiral R. L. Conolly and lifting the 7th Infantry Division, and Attack Group B, TG.79.2 under Rear-Admiral Forrest B. Royal, carrying the 96th Infantry Division. Fire support for the Southern Attack Force was by the balance of Rear-Admiral Oldendorf's TG.77.2, battleships *Tennessee*, *California* and *Pennsylvania*; and cruisers *Louisville* (Flag), *Portland*, *Minneapolis*, *Honolulu*, *Denver*, and *Columbia*.<sup>6</sup>

Close air support and air cover were provided by TF.77.4, Rear-Admiral Thomas L. Sprague's force of 18 escort carriers screened by 9 destroyers and 14 destroyer escorts. These, with a total complement of 448 aircraft, were organised in three units each of 6 carriers with destroyers and destroyer escorts—a northern group commanded by Rear-Admiral Clifton Sprague, a central group commanded by Rear-Admiral T. L. Sprague, and a southern group under Rear-Admiral F. B. Stump.

Overall cover and support for the operation was given by Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet of 6 modern battleships, 9 large and 8 light aircraft carriers with a combined complement of 1,074 aircraft, 6 heavy and 9 light cruisers, and 58 destroyers. Third Fleet (Halsey flying his flag in *New Jersey*<sup>7</sup>) was divided into the four Fast Carrier Groups of Vice-Admiral Mitscher's TF.38 (*Lexington*, Flag)—Task Groups 38.1, 38.2, 38.3 and 38.4—each with its surface ship force.

<sup>5</sup> *Killen*, US destroyer (1944), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

<sup>6</sup> *Denver*, *Columbia*, US cruisers (1942), 10,000 tons, twelve 6-in and twelve 5-in guns, three aircraft, 32½ kts.

<sup>7</sup> *New Jersey*, US battleship (1943), 45,000 tons, nine 16-in and twenty 5-in guns, three aircraft, 33 kts.

As Commander Third Fleet, Halsey was responsible to Admiral Nimitz. There was thus joint command at the Leyte operation, with MacArthur and Nimitz each separately responsible to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their individual tasks. Nimitz's Operation Plan 8-44 of 27th September directed Halsey to cover and support South-West Pacific forces in the Philippines operation, and to destroy enemy naval and air forces threatening the area. An important clause in the plan, which, in the event, influenced the tide of battle in the forthcoming operation, laid down that if opportunity for the destruction of the major portion of the enemy fleet were offered or could be created, then such destruction would become the primary task.

After consultation between the MacArthur and Halsey commands at the end of September, it was agreed that Third Fleet would cover and support the Leyte operation by striking Okinawa, Formosa, and northern Leyte on 10th-13th October; hit Leyte, Cebu, and Negros, and support the Leyte landings 16th-20th October; and operate in support of the Leyte operation by destroying enemy naval and air forces threatening the Philippines area on and after 21st October. The inclusion of the "destruction of the enemy fleet the primary task" clause was an echo from the Marianas campaign. Then no such clause was in Nimitz's Operational Plan for the Fifth Fleet, and, as stated earlier, Admiral Spruance took as his primary duty the covering of the assault on Saipan, and therefore rejected Mitscher's proposal that he subordinate it to seeking out and destroying the Japanese fleet on the strength of a high frequency direction finding position. His decision then—though undoubtedly the right one—later earned him some strong adverse criticism. Halsey was determined that a similar situation should not arise now with the Third Fleet, and his own Third Fleet Operation Order 21-24 of 3rd October contained the clause: "If opportunity exists or can be created to destroy major portion of enemy fleet this becomes primary task." In discussing the matter, the American naval historian remarks:

If Spruance had gone roaring out after the enemy fleet in June, and, by a mistaken course, had given it the opportunity to break up the assault on Saipan, his name would have become infamous. Halsey's determination not to repeat what he regarded as Spruance's undue caution and lack of offensive spirit, led to the most controversial episode in the Battle for Leyte Gulf.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the cruisers and destroyers in TG.77.3 and the three landing ships in TG.78.3, two other Australian ships were at the Leyte landing. They were the frigate H.M.A.S. *Gascoyne* and *HDML1074*, both with TG.77.5, the Minesweeping and Hydrographic Group commanded by Commander W. R. Loud. TG.77.5, whose 24 vessels were mostly mine-sweepers, included also two minelayers and one destroyer transport in addition to *Gascoyne* and *HDML1074*. And in TG.77.7—Service Force

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<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol XII, p. 59.

Seventh Fleet—the Leyte Gulf Unit included the Australian ships *Bishopdale* (8,406 tons), *Poyang* (Lieutenant Edwards<sup>9</sup>), *Yunnan*<sup>1</sup> (Lieutenant Hehir<sup>2</sup>), and *Merkur*.

In a post-war interrogation, Admiral Toyoda recounted how, late in 1940, soon after Japan formally joined in the Tripartite Treaty of alliance with Germany and Italy, Yamamoto, the then Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet, told the Japanese Premier, Prince Konoye, that if Japan went to war her navy would “carry through for one year, some way; but after that I don’t know”.<sup>3</sup> This statement of Yamamoto’s, with all it implied regarding Time’s position as a wartime enemy of the Japanese Navy and Nation, must often have been remembered by Toyoda as Time’s toll mounted from mid-1942 onwards, and especially so when Yamamoto’s mantle fell on his shoulders with his assumption of the office of Commander-in-Chief, Combined Fleet in May 1944 after the death of Admiral Koga. He followed Koga in that officer’s adherence to Yamamoto’s “quick knock out” strategy, practised at Pearl Harbour in 1941, attempted at Midway in 1942, planned by Koga as Operation “Z”, and again put into operation—and again disastrously for the Japanese—by Toyoda as A-go at the Battle of the Philippines. This battle retold, in its heavy blows suffered by Japanese naval aviation, the story of Midway. After it, Toyoda echoed Yamamoto’s comment to Prince Konoye when, asked by Admiral Yonai, the Navy Minister, if Japan could hold out till the end of the year, he replied: “It will probably be extremely difficult to do so.”<sup>4</sup>

Time was now again weighting the balance heavily against the Japanese. Like the Americans, they fully appreciated the strategic importance of the Philippines. With the fall of the Marianas in July, they realised that they must again withdraw their defence perimeter, now to a line extending from the Kuriles and Japanese home islands, through the Ryukyus, Formosa, and the Philippines to the Netherlands East Indies. In this chain the Philippines were the key links. Their retention secured the pipe-line—inadequate though it was—which supplied Japan from her southern resources. Their loss would cut her off from all outside supplies excepting those from China.

They knew that the enemy would soon be assaulting the islands, but which, and when, were matters of uncertainty to them. In August 1944 *Imperial General Headquarters* decided that top priority in preparation for a “general decisive battle”—called SHO-go, meaning “Victory Operation”—must be the Philippines. But they did not expect the major assault before mid-November. Meanwhile they were suffering disadvantages. It was impossible to counter a sea-borne invasion without the participation of the *Combined Fleet*. But this lacked naval air forces and light forces. The Battle of the Philippine Sea had broken the fleet’s carrier-borne air power,

<sup>9</sup> Lt J. W. Edwards, RANVR. HMAS *Toorie*; comd HMAS’s *King Bay* 1943, *Poyang* 1943-46. B. Adelaide, 23 Mar 1906.

<sup>1</sup> HMAS *Yunnan*, stores issuing ship (1944), 2,812 tons.

<sup>2</sup> Lt T. T. M. Hehir, RANR. Comd HMAS’s *Nambucca* 1941-42, *Tambar* and *Baralaba* 1942. *Terka* 1943-44, *Yunnan* 1944-46. Merchant seaman; of Glenelg, SA; b. Benalla, Vic, 12 May 1896.

<sup>3</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, p. 465.

<sup>4</sup> *The End of the Imperial Navy* (1950), pp. 149-54. Quoted by Morison, Vol XII, p. 66.

and attrition had reduced the light forces. Furthermore, attrition had also depleted Japan's supply fleet, and the flow from the southern areas to Japan was woefully inadequate. Thus the Navy's tactical forces had to be split up. After the Philippine Sea battle, Ozawa's carrier forces went to the Inland Sea of Japan in order to train new air groups—a proceeding in which Time again took a deciding hand. The main surface forces under Admiral Kurita returned to Lingga Roads south of Singapore in order to be near their fuel supply—Japan's shortage of oil could not be overcome because of the constricted supply lines. A smaller force of three cruisers and about nine destroyers was in the Inland Sea under the command of Vice-Admiral Shima.

About the time when, in August 1944, Japanese *Imperial Headquarters* decided upon the SHO-GO operation, Admiral Toyoda's Chief of Staff issued a statement commenting upon the results of A-GO. Since that operation, he said, the battle situation had become more serious. And he went on: "Because the operational strength of base air forces is insufficient, Mobile Force is expected to exert its utmost strength. . . . It must make a desperate effort to defeat the enemy." Thus the SHO-GO plan was designed to offset the inadequate air strength by using the heavy surface ships. Since Time did not permit the training of replacements of airmen lost in A-GO sufficiently to enable them to operate from carriers, the High Command planned to use naval air units, flying carrier-borne types, but operating from land bases. And in the final plan the carrier force in SHO-GO was used as a bait to draw off America's TF.38 and leave the field clear for Japan's battleships.

The Japanese Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Toyoda, was at Tokyo. Highest ranking officer under him was Vice-Admiral Ozawa, Commander-in-Chief *Mobile Fleet*, which included practically all the surface combatant ships of the Japanese Navy not employed in convoy or transport. Ozawa himself exercised operational command of the carrier force—which was in the Inland Sea—and in August 1944 hoisted his flag in the new carrier *Amagi*.<sup>5</sup> But because of the lack of trained pilots, neither she nor two other operational carriers, *Junyo* and *Kyujō*, could be used before November. Main Body—as the carrier force was designated—therefore, before November, consisted of the two old battleships *Ise* and *Hyuga* which had partly converted to carriers; the Coral Sea veteran *Zuikaku*; and light carriers *Zuihō*, *Chitose*, and *Chiyoda*. These were to form the Northern Force at the forthcoming battle for Leyte. The major part of Ozawa's *Mobile Fleet* was at Lingga Roads under Kurita. Known as First Striking Force, it was divided into two groups, Centre Force under Kurita's operational command, and Southern Force under Vice-Admiral Nishimura. Centre Force comprised the world's largest warships, the battleships *Yamato* and *Musashi*; the older battleships *Nagato*, *Kongo* and *Haruna*; heavy cruisers *Atago*, *Takao*, *Maya*, *Chokai*, *Myoko*, *Haguro*, *Kumano*, *Suzuya*, *Chikuma* and *Tone*; light cruisers *Noshiro* and *Yahagi*;<sup>6</sup> and 15

<sup>5</sup> *Amagi*, Japanese aircraft carrier (1944), 18,500 tons. Sunk at Kure, 24 Jul 1945.

<sup>6</sup> *Yahagi*, Japanese cruiser (1943), 7,000 tons. Sunk off Kyushu, 7 Apr 1945.

destroyers. Southern Force consisted of battleships *Yamashiro* and *Fuso*, heavy cruiser *Mogami*, and four destroyers. Based on the Inland Sea was Second Striking Force, Shima's heavy cruisers *Nachi* and *Ashigara*, light cruiser *Abukuma*, and nine destroyers. On the eve of the Leyte assault, Second Striking Force was in the Pescadores, west of Formosa.

Submarines and aircraft had important roles in the defence of the Philippines. Eleven submarines were, by the time of the SHO-GO attack on 25th October, strung along from San Bernardino Strait southward to a point about east of Davao in Mindanao. Before the American landing at Leyte the land-based naval aircraft in the Philippines were much reduced as the result of American carrier air strikes. As a result, immediately after the landing, most of the *Second Air Fleet* at Formosa under Vice-Admiral Fukudome was moved to the Philippines to form the *Combined Base Air Force* in conjunction with the land-based naval aircraft remaining there. All the naval air forces in the Philippines were under the command of the Commander-in-Chief *South-West Area Fleet*, Vice-Admiral Mikawa who, two years earlier, had secured a telling Japanese victory in the Battle of Savo Island. To oppose the landing, the Japanese had in all about 600 shore-based aircraft in the Philippines.

The Japanese plan of operations against the invasion forces visualised an enveloping attack from two directions on the landing ships and supporting warships of the invaders, aided by a diversion which it was hoped would draw off Halsey's Third Fleet and thus clear the way for the Japanese surface ships of First and Second Striking Forces. Of First Striking Force, Nishimura's Southern Force would debouch from the Sulu Sea through Surigao Strait. This, between Leyte Island and Mindanao, would also be the sally port for Shima's Second Striking Force. Kurita's main fleet, the Northern Force, would enter the Philippine Sea through San Bernardino Strait, the passage separating the southern extremity of Luzon and the northern point of Samar Island—whose southern half formed the north-eastern shores of Leyte Gulf. Ozawa's Northern Force would sortie from the Inland Sea through Bungo Strait and make down south-westerly to be sighted to the east of Luzon, there to entice the American Third Fleet. On the eve of Leyte there remained for the Japanese the decision as to the crucial moment of activating SHO-GO.



## CHAPTER 17

### LEYTE

ON 26th September TF.33, the force intended for the invasion of Yap, arrived at Eniwetok, something more than half-way along the road from Pearl Harbour to the objective. Since it left Hawaii, the decision had been reached by the Allied High Command to cancel the Yap operation and to utilise TF.33 "in its entirety of both assault shipping and troops" at Leyte. In consequence, TF.33—soon to become TF.79—instead of proceeding onwards to Yap, sailed for Manus, where it arrived on 3rd and 4th October in two groups, one of transports and one of L.S.T's. The period at Manus was spent in upkeep of vessels, preparation of final plans, and furnishing recreation for the troops and ships' companies who, by the time they reached Leyte, would have been in crowded conditions on board for five weeks. On 11th October the L.S.T. convoy sailed for the Philippines. The transport convoy followed on the 14th.

Also at Manus during this period were *Australia*, *Shropshire*, *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, of TF.74. After the Morotai operation the Task Force spent some days at Mios Wundi. While there, on 25th September, Captain C. A. G. Nichols, R.N., assumed command of *Shropshire* vice Captain Showers, who returned to Australia to take up the appointment of 2nd Naval Member of the Naval Board in succession to Captain Moore. As part of Berkey's TF.75 the force left Mios Wundi on 27th September and reached Manus on the 29th.

While at Manus, where the time was occupied in exercising, *Australia* was boarded by Admiral of the Fleet Lord Keyes,<sup>1</sup> who was on a tour of inspection. On 11th October the four Australian ships and U.S.S. *Beale*, now forming Task Unit 77.3.2, departed Manus as part of Rear-Admiral Berkey's TG.77.3. Hollandia was reached at noon next day.

The day TG.77.3 reached Hollandia there sailed thence TG.78.4, "Dinagat Force". Its eight destroyer transports and miscellaneous craft lifted the 6th Ranger Battalion, whose task was to eliminate enemy installations on Dinagat, Calicoan, Suluan and Homonhon Islands at the entrance to Leyte Gulf. There sailed with it from Hollandia Commander Loud's TG.77.5, the Minesweeping and Hydrographic Group, including *Gascoyne* (Commander Read). First of the Australian Navy's frigates, *Gascoyne* commissioned on 18th November 1943. Until the end of May 1944 *Gascoyne* was employed on escort and routine duties in eastern Australian and New Guinea waters. June and July were spent in Sydney refitting. August and September were again spent in routine duties in New Guinea waters, and on 1st October, in Hollandia, Commander Hunt joined the ship as Commander TG.70.5 Afloat, on her being assigned to hydrographic

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<sup>1</sup> Admiral of Fleet Lord Keyes, GCB, KCVO, CMG, DSO; RN. Director of Combined Ops 1940-41. B. 1872. Died 26 Dec 1945.

work. H.M.A.S. *Warrego*, which had been at Morotai with the Northern Hydrographical Unit of Seventh Fleet and was now about to go to Sydney for refit, arrived at Hollandia on 2nd October and transferred hydrographical gear and personnel to *Gascoyne*.

Another Australian ship with the Hydrographical Unit was *HDML1074* (Lieut-Commander Robertson<sup>2</sup>) which Hunt sailed from Hollandia on 6th October to join the Manus L.S.T. convoy of TF.79 which, as stated above, left the Admiralties on the 11th. "This day" (11th October), wrote Captain Ray Tarbuck, U.S.N., an observer who was with VII Amphibious Force in Barbey's flagship *Blue Ridge*,<sup>3</sup> "there were 331 ships in [Humboldt Bay] harbour, varying in size from rocket boats to five thousand man troopers. A few Australian and Norwegian ships were present." The "few Australian" ships included *Manoora*, *Westralia* and *Kanimbla* which had been together there since 1st October. The days preceding departure were spent in overhauling gear and embarking troops and supplies, and on the 10th the three ships, and H.M.S. *Ariadne*, led by Rear-Admiral Struble in his flagship *Hughes*, carried out a full-scale landing rehearsal at Tanahmerah Bay.

On the 12th more Australian ships arrived—those of Berkey's TG.77.3—and next day, which was to belie the old sea superstition about sailing on a Friday, there were 471 ships in port. This number was decreased at intervals during the day as groups sailed. At 2 p.m. Barbey's flagship *Blue Ridge* weighed, and Tarbuck recorded that "one hundred and eighteen (118) other ships also got under way, many loaded with troops starting a thirteen hundred mile, seven day voyage. It is Friday the 13th. By sundown convoy is formed and we are darkening ship." The three Australian L.S.I's weighed at 3 p.m. Half an hour later Berkey's TG.77.3 sailed and formed cruising disposition as Close Support and Covering Group to the convoy.

The voyage of the Northern Attack Force to Leyte was without undue incident, and "excellent weather with smooth to slight seas and light variable winds was experienced throughout the whole voyage. Speeds of seven to nine knots were maintained."<sup>4</sup> The size of the convoy was lifted with the joining of III Amphibious Force transports convoy from Manus on 15th October, and Captain Tarbuck commented in his report:

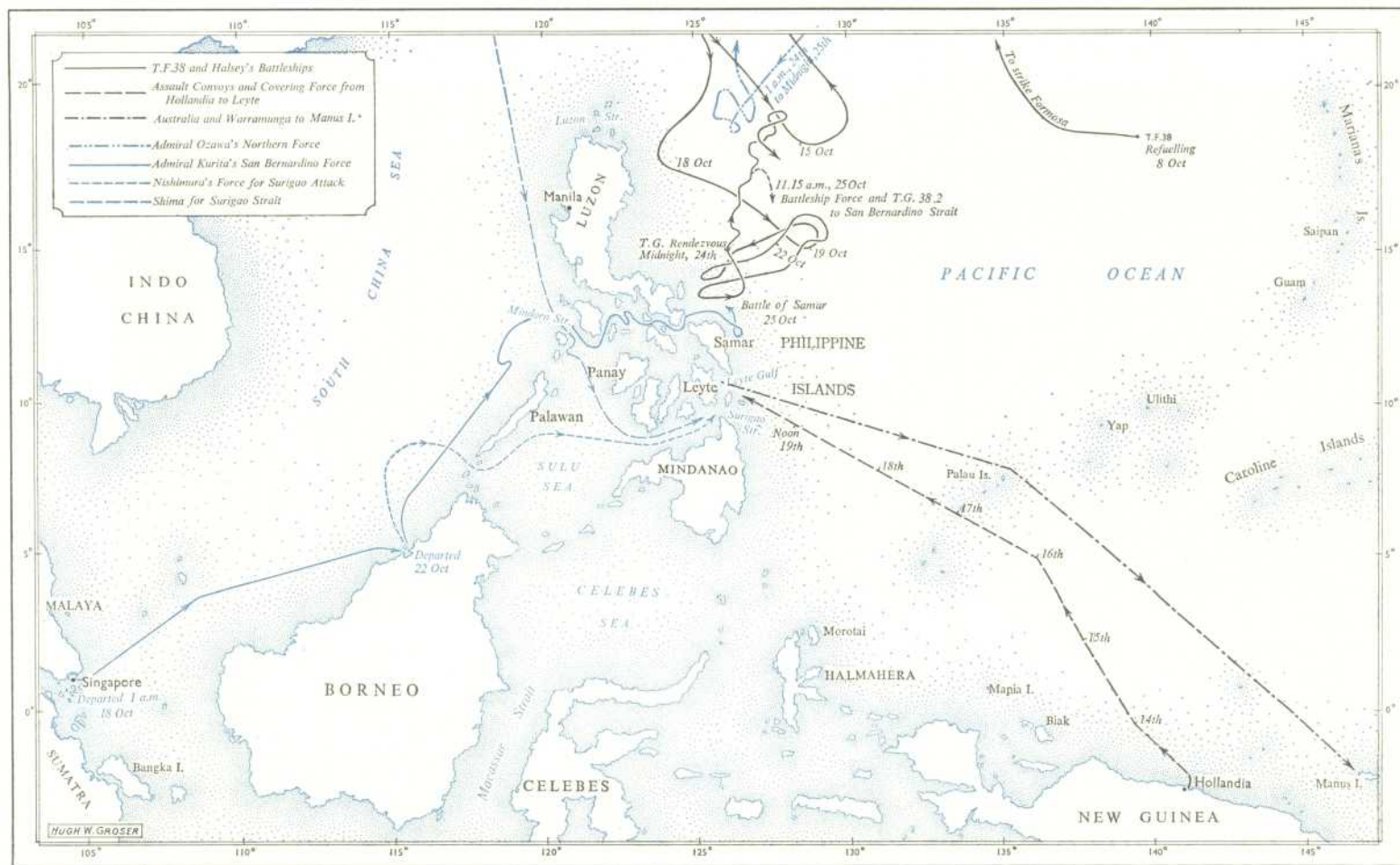
No one could see this great panorama of ships without realising the impotence of any great army engaged in oceanic warfare without control of the sea and air. It has taken thirty-four months of work and patience to build and prepare the combatant and amphibious shipping which enables us to sail to the Philippines today. Practically none of these ships was in existence at the time of the siege of Corregidor.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Cdr S. W. S. Robertson, DSC; RAN. HMAS *Winter* and *HDML1074* (in comd 1944-45). Of Melbourne; b. Sale, Vic, 8 Feb 1902.

<sup>3</sup> *Blue Ridge*, US amphibious force command ship (1943), 7,431 tons.

<sup>4</sup> *Manoora's* report.

<sup>5</sup> Commander Bunyan, in *Kanimbla*, recorded on 15th October that with the joining of the Manus contingent "the Task Force now consisted of the following ships: USS *Blue Ridge*, flagship, in position ahead, followed by the transports *Fayette*, *Ormsby*, *Leedstown*, *Titania*, *Hercules*, *Epping Forest*, *Carter Hall*, *Du Page*, *Fuller*, *Elmore*, *Wayne*, *Aquarius*, *John Loud*, *Gunston Hall*, *Manoora*, *Kanimbla*, and *Westralia*. Astern of the transports were 11 PCs, two SCs, 45



The Battles for Leyte—main moves 13th-25th October 1944

That day, too, Tarbuck recorded that word was received in the convoy that the American cruisers *Houston*<sup>6</sup> and *Canberra* had been torpedoed and were under tow. "Apparently an enemy striking force is at sea, for Admiral Halsey informs us that he was deploying the Third Fleet for action and that no further support for the Leyte operation could be expected until the situation clears." The mishaps to the two cruisers were incurred in a series of massive air strikes carried out on the Formosa area by TF.38 from 10th to 14th October inclusive. These destroyed over 500 Japanese aircraft, sank 26 ships each of more than 500 tons and aggregating some 71,000 tons, plus a number of smaller vessels, and caused great destruction of ammunition dumps, hangars, barracks and industrial plants. Third Fleet suffered *Canberra* and *Houston* both hit and badly crippled by aerial torpedoes in Japanese land-based air attacks. Both ships sustained heavy casualties, but by a fine feat of salvage both were towed safely to Ulithi, whence they later reached the United States by way of Manus and Pearl Harbour.

Tarbuck's reference to "an enemy striking force" was apparently to Vice-Admiral Shima's Second Striking Force. Japanese aviators had sent in such optimistic reports of the success of their attacks on TF.38 that the Japanese were deluded into believing that *Houston* and *Canberra* represented the remnants of that force. Shima sortied from the Inland Sea in the hope of sinking crippled carriers, and Halsey's deployment of Third Fleet was such as to encourage Shima to enter a trap. But Shima became suspicious when he was attacked by two carrier-borne aircraft on the morning of 16th October, and reversed course. The soundness of his decision was confirmed that afternoon by a signal from Admiral Fukudome advising him that "more than six carriers" were still operating east of Formosa. TF.38, in operations against Formosa and other targets in the six days 11th to 16th October, lost 89 aircraft—76 of them in combat—with 64 pilots and crewmen.

Not all the ships of the American assault convoys bound for Leyte experienced the "excellent weather with smooth to slight seas and light variable winds" enjoyed by the main convoy. TG.77.5, the Minesweeping and Hydrographic Group, some distance ahead with the Dinagat Force, was "apparently on the front quadrant of a typhoon, which was proceeding in a westerly direction at a slightly greater speed than the convoy".<sup>7</sup> This resulted in heavy weather from the west with driving rain squalls and visibility at times "zero", which were contributory factors to a mishap to *HDML1074*. The Dinagat Group met three fleet tankers and the Manus slow convoy during the night of the 14th, and commenced fuelling. It was reported on the morning of the 15th that in the bad weather

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LCIs, 84 LSTs, 9 LSMs, 40 XAKs. HMA Ships *Australia* and *Shropshire* off the port bow with USS *Boise* and *Phoenix* off the starboard bow formed part of the escort. The destroyers *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, US destroyers *Schroeder*, *Murray*, *Ringgold*, *Sigsbee*, *Dashiell*, *Hutchins*, *John Rodgers*, *Harrison*, *McKee*, *Russell*, *Killen*, *Daly*, *Bache* and *Beale* were stationed [in circular formation] as destroyer screen."

<sup>6</sup> *Houston*, US cruiser (1943), 10,000 tons, twelve 6-in and twelve 5-in guns, three aircraft, 32½ kts.

<sup>7</sup> *Gascoyne*, Letter of Proceedings.

*HDML1074* had dropped astern of the Manus convoy and was no longer in company. She was subsequently located some 26 miles astern of the convoy and taken in tow by the minelayer U.S.S. *Preble*<sup>8</sup> of TG.77.5. It transpired that at 4 a.m. on the morning of the 16th, "in visibility zero with driving rain", *HDML1074* had been challenged by light by an unknown ship—presumed to be one of the tanker escorts—which, receiving an indecipherable reply from the wildly moving H.D.M.L., attempted to ram. This was partially avoided by the H.D.M.L., which suffered considerable bow damage. On ascertaining that the H.D.M.L. was not sinking, the stranger, at her victim's request, reported to CTG.77.5, who sent *Preble* to her assistance; and *HDML1074* carried on successfully to Leyte. Of her, Hunt said in his report:

The performance of *HDML1074* in steaming some 3,000 miles of open sea from Morotai Island, Halmaheras, to Leyte Gulf via Hollandia and Manus, with breaks of 48 hours at Hollandia and 24 hours at Manus only, during which time the ship's company were employed embarking stores, fuel, etc., and in weathering a typhoon after having been in collision, reflects great credit on the Commanding Officer and all concerned.

On 16th and 17th October the cruisers of TG.77.3 fuelled the destroyers, and while *Shropshire* was fuelling *Warramunga* on the 17th advantage was taken to transfer Lieut-Commander Alliston from the cruiser to the destroyer to relieve Mackinnon—who was seriously ill—in command. A diarist in *Shropshire*<sup>9</sup> recorded the incident:

An interesting happening occurred whilst one of the destroyers was being oiled by us. It appears that the Commanding Officer of this destroyer had become extremely ill and was physically incapable of continuing in active command. One of the senior officers of my ship had an impressive record as a destroyer captain on other stations, and it was decided to transfer him to the command of the destroyer immediately—much to his joy! So, during the course of the fuelling operation, he was transferred from one ship to the other as they steamed alongside, and the destroyer received its skipper in one of the most novel ways on record . . . per bosun's chair . . . and the sick officer was sent to us in the same way.<sup>1</sup>

When this was going on, the main convoy was south-west of the Palau Islands, some 500 miles from Leyte Gulf. Dinagat Attack Force was at that time making the entrance to the gulf. Four hours later, at noon on the 17th, *Gascoyne* and the rest of TG.77.5 made the entrance to the gulf, the weather with them being still bad, "wind Force 10-11 in gusts W.S.W., visibility zero". About 4 p.m. the wind commenced to back and conditions immediately improved, so that by daylight on the 18th the sea was smooth, the wind light, and the sky clearing.

There were widely separated happenings on this morning of 17th October. At 6.50 a.m. the Dinagat Attack Force was sighted by Japanese lookouts on Suluan Island. The garrison commander there promptly notified Admiral Toyoda. He, at 8.9 a.m., issued the alert for SHO-GO

<sup>8</sup> *Preble*, US minelayer (conv. 1937), 1,190 tons, three 3-in guns, 30 kts.

<sup>9</sup> Ldg Writer J. Yeomans, S5294.

<sup>1</sup> It will be recalled that Alliston was captain of HMS *Javelin* which endeavoured to succour *Nestor* when that ship was crippled by air attack in the Mediterranean, and which eventually removed *Nestor's* company and sank the ship on 16th June 1942.

(SHO-1, the Philippines battle plan). Nine minutes earlier U.S.S. *Denver*, of Rear-Admiral Oldendorf's Fire Support Unit South, opened fire on Suluan Island—first ship to open fire in the assault on the Philippine Islands. And about that time in the Indian Ocean, 1,800 miles due west from Leyte, bombs from aircraft of the Eastern Fleet carriers *Indomitable* and *Victorious* struck Japanese shipping and harbour and airfield installations at Nancowry, in the Nicobar Islands.

This Eastern Fleet operation (MILLET) was carried out as a diversion, at the request of Admiral King. Two Australian ships, the destroyers *Quiberon* (Commander W. H. Harrington) and *Norman* (Commander Buchanan), participated. The object of the operation was to cause the Japanese to expect a landing, and the selected targets were chosen with this in mind. The Force—Force 63—under the orders of Vice-Admiral Eastern Fleet, Vice-Admiral Power, left Trincomalee on the morning of 15th October. It was organised in three groups: (1) *Renown* (Flag) and destroyers *Quilliam*, *Queenborough* and *Quiberon*; (2) *London*, *Cumberland*, *Suffolk*, and destroyers *Relentless*, *Raider*, *Norman*, and *Van Galen*; (3) *Indomitable*, *Victorious*, *Phoebe*, and destroyers *Whelp*, *Wakeful*, *Wessex* and *Wager*.<sup>2</sup>

At 6 a.m. on the 17th, when about 17 miles S.S.E. of Car Nicobar, the carriers parted company for their flying-off position, and half an hour later began flying off aircraft. Surprise was achieved, and aircraft were over the target area for several minutes before anti-aircraft fire materialised. Bombing was accurate, and the *Ishikari Maru*, only sizeable ship in the harbour, was sunk by a direct hit. The surface bombardment began at 8 a.m., when Group 2 opened fire on targets in the Malacca area. Eight minutes later Group 1 began bombarding in the Car Nicobar area. That night *London*, *Norman* and *Van Galen*, detached from Group 2, carried out a bombardment of Car Nicobar before withdrawing to Trincomalee. A second bombardment of Car Nicobar was carried out on the 18th by *Renown*, *Suffolk*, *Raider*, *Quilliam* and *Queenborough*.

The operation failed in its objective of diverting the Japanese from the Pacific. It inflicted some damage, and cost the Japanese seven aircraft (shot down when they attempted a raid on the Eastern Fleet on the 19th in the only reaction to the raid). The Eastern Fleet lost six air crew and eight aircraft—but gained in morale as a result of the raid.

The Japanese stake in the Pacific was too big for any Indian Ocean inducement to divert them. Having given the SHO-GO alert, Toyoda waited only for certainty that Leyte was the American target, and at 11.10 a.m. on 18th October he gave the "Execute" order. Meanwhile Kurita's First Striking Force left Lingga Roads at 1 a.m. on the 18th for Brunei in North Borneo; and on 20th October—the invaders' "A-day" at Leyte—Admiral Ozawa's Main Body, the Northern Force, got under way in two sections from Kure and Beppu in the Inland Sea, rendezvoused in Bungo Strait,

<sup>2</sup> HMS's *Whelp*, *Wakeful*, *Wessex*, *Wager*, destroyers (1943), 1,710 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

and emerged thence into the open ocean that evening. The counter moves to the invasion were initiated.

## II

In Leyte Gulf preparations were being made for the arrival of the invasion fleet. In the afternoon of the 17th, minesweepers located fields and swept mines. At 7 a.m. on the 18th *Gascoyne* entered the gulf and proceeded up the swept channel to San Pedro Bay, where, with YMS393,<sup>3</sup> she commenced buoing the shoals. The two ships were unsuccessfully bombed by a Japanese aircraft in the evening dusk. That day the island objectives of the Dinagat Attack Force were secured with the unopposed occupation of the last on the list, Homonhon. Next day, the 19th, Seventh Fleet suffered its first casualty in the Leyte operation when the destroyer *Ross*,<sup>4</sup> covering the minesweepers, herself struck two mines. She had 23 men killed and was put out of the fight. At noon on the 19th *Gascoyne* completed the buoing. She and the Y.M.S. had placed 23 dan and drum buoys. Admiral Oldendorf's bombardment group of battleships, cruisers and destroyers, which entered the gulf in the evening of the 18th, commenced their bombardments of the landing beach areas between 8.30 and 9 a.m. on the 19th, the Southern Unit at Dulag, and Weyler's Northern Unit at Tacloban. Bombardments, and work by underwater demolition teams, continued throughout the day, during which twelve of Rear-Admiral Sprague's escort carriers (the other six were providing air cover for the convoys) continued the task they had commenced on the 18th of neutralising Japanese airfields in the Visayas and Mindanao. At this time Halsey was holding most of TF.38 north-east of Luzon in the hope that the Japanese Fleet would still come out to sink the Third Fleet "remnants", and consequently the pre-landing aerial bombardment task devolved upon Sprague.

At noon on the 19th H.M.A.S. *Australia*, with the approaching assault convoy, was in position 9 degrees 42 minutes North, 127 degrees 16 minutes East, 130 miles south-east of Leyte Gulf. For some time the convoy had been within easy range of enemy reconnaissance aircraft from Mindanao, but none was detected, "and we were apparently not sighted". In *Shropshire* the diarist recorded that

"Just-in-case" kits were packed into convenient bags by most men and these contained motley items that had been received from home—condensed milk, barley sugar, processed chocolate, biscuits, raisins, etc. Into this kit also went as a rule a wallet, bankbook, photo of his beloved and, in the case of the Casanovas, the much prized "address book".

In *Manoora* action stations were closed up at midnight on the 19th. The Assistant Director of Intelligence on MacArthur's staff (Lieutenant Bullock<sup>5</sup>) who had manoeuvred a passage in her as observer found that

<sup>3</sup> YMS393, US motor minesweeper, 207 tons, one 3-in gun, 13 kts.

<sup>4</sup> *Ross*, US destroyer (1944), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

<sup>5</sup> Lt H. W. Bullock, RANVR. NLO Vila 1941-42, Asst Director (Int) GHQ, SWPA 1943-45. Aust High Commissioner in Tanzania since 1966. Public servant; of Sydney; b. Toowoomba, Qld, 10 Feb 1916.

a certain amount of natural nervous tension became apparent. Everyone expecting something but not knowing how much, and it did not help any to know that we were carrying approximately 400 tons of ammunition and petrol in the forward hold.

In Barbey's flagship, *Blue Ridge*, Mindanao was sighted broad on the port bow at 6 p.m. on the 19th, and Tarbuck recorded that

Protestant and Catholic evening prayers were broadcast over the public announcing system. This apparently helped some people, but to others acted as a depressment. Some men whom I queried said it gave them a lift, many said that they felt they were being administered last rites. Obviously if prayer is necessary before going into action, it should be private. At least from a military viewpoint, prayer forced upon some men by loud speakers has a bad psychological effect.

In the late afternoon of the 19th, ships streamed paravanes. During the night *Shropshire* picked up a mine in her port paravane, and, as Midshipman Francis recorded: "Our interest was in a trailing wake slightly astern of the port P/V. At 0600 [20th October] a mine was reported in the wake, and fifteen minutes later course was altered to port to clear the port P/V. Another mine, with its horns clearly visible, could be seen floating close down the port side."

Earlier, at 2 a.m. on the 20th, the Panaon Attack Group detached from the main force, and as dawn broke proceeded down the swept channel through Surigao Strait, with Dinagat Island to port and a mist-shrouded Leyte to starboard. Rear-Admiral Struble's flagship *Hughes* led the way, followed by H.M.S. *Ariadne* and H.M.A. Ships *Manoora*, *Kanimbla* and *Westralia*, two P.C's and some L.C.I's. The ships were screened by American destroyers *Ringgold*, *Sigsbee*, *Schroeder* and *Dashiell*.<sup>6</sup>

Dawn broke fine and clear, with light airs and very smooth sea. At 7.15 a.m. one lone Japanese fighter aircraft appeared, dropped one bomb which fell harmlessly well astern of the convoy, and made off to the south-west. The transports arrived in the inner transport area at 8.45 a.m., and boats were lowered and troops began disembarking. Word was received that there were no Japanese on Panaon Island or on the extreme south end of Leyte Island, and the scheduled bombardment was cancelled. At 9.26 all troops were disembarked, and the three Australian L.S.I's moved closer in to discharge cargo, and anchored just after 10 a.m. in 40 fathoms, 800 yards from the nearest beach and 1,500 yards from Green 1 landing beach. All assault waves landed on time, and the beach was found to be excellent for landing craft.

No enemy interference was experienced throughout the whole operation of discharging troops and cargo. Aircraft from Admiral Sprague's escort carriers patrolled overhead all day, and the ships were surrounded by canoes filled with Filipinos. "Food, cigarettes and clothing were handed out to these people," recorded Cousin in *Manoora*, "whose gratitude at deliverance from the Japanese was most sincere and moving. This day was a real 'red letter day' in their lives."

<sup>6</sup> *Ringgold*, *Sigsbee*, *Schroeder*, *Dashiell*, US destroyers (1942-43), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.



Discharge of cargo was completed soon after 4 p.m., and at 5.51 *Manoora*—Senior Officer—weighed anchor and proceeded in formation with *Westralia* and *Kanimbla* and destroyer escort. At intervals during the next hour ships of the convoy drove off a solitary Japanese aircraft—possibly the same one attacking from different directions—which was unable to get in close enough to attack, and the ships, led by Struble in *Hughes*, made their way through the straits unharmed. During the night 15 attack transports (A.P.A.'s) from Barbey's Northern Attack Force joined the Panaon Group, and at dawn on the 21st the convoy of 18 transports, escorted by five American destroyers, proceeded for Hollandia. The three Australian ships anchored in Humboldt Bay just after 10 a.m. on 25th October. In commenting on the operation, Commander Cousin commended those in the three ships "for their excellent performance", and remarked in his report regarding *Manoora*:

The whole operation of landing assault troops and cargo was performed to schedule. The cargo was discharged at a high rate, averaging 90 tons per hour, working three hatches into nothing larger than L.C.M's and L.C.V.P's. This is considered the maximum possible, and great credit is due to the Landing Ship Detachment of the Australian Imperial Force and Lieutenant R. F. Jelley,<sup>7</sup> A.I.F., the Officer in Charge of the stevedoring on board.

A message to each of the three ships from Admiral Barbey, CTG.78.3, recorded his satisfaction in the words: "The smart performance of your ships today was most gratifying. Officers and men did a splendid job. The Attack Group Commander expresses his appreciation."

### III

While the Panaon operation was carried out quietly and peacefully, much noise characterised the landings in Leyte Gulf, where battleship, cruiser, destroyer and aerial bombardments provided the heavy thunder to the continuous roar of the rocket explosions on the beaches. *Gascoyne* and *HDML1074* greeted A-day at anchor in the vicinity of Mariquitdaquit Island, which lies six miles off the Leyte beaches just midway between the northern and southern landing beaches, so that their companies had a grandstand view of the early proceedings, with the procession of Fechteler's ships for the Beach White landings passing to the east of Mariquitdaquit Island and that of Barbey's for Beach Red passing to the west of the island.

"A-day, 20th October, dawned bright and clear," recorded Hunt in his Letter of Proceedings:

From early dawn when the battleships of the bombardment groups followed by the heavy US and RAN cruisers, and numerous destroyers, moved in, until well towards H-hour, 1000, there was a steady procession of ships past us to their anchorages off the White and Red Beaches between San Ricardo and Palo, Leyte. . . . The preliminary bombardment of the beaches just prior to the first wave landing was most impressive, although I understand that immediately the first wave landed on White Beach they were greeted by a Filipino woman and her children who had been living in a grass hut some hundred yards from the water's edge.

<sup>7</sup> Lt R. F. Jelley, TX1904. HQ 3 Aust Water Transport Gp; 1 Aust Landing Ship Detachment, RAE. Manufacturer's representative; of Sandy Bay, Tas; b. Wellington, NZ, 17 Jul 1910.

This last-mentioned incident may have been due to the fact that in contrast to conditions at Red Beach, Admiral Fechteler's San Ricardo Group's landings on White Beach were virtually unopposed. At Red Beach the L.S.T's which, owing to the flat beach were unable to approach near enough to the shore to discharge, came under mortar fire, and three were hit. In *Blue Ridge*, Tarbuck watched *West Virginia*, at 7.50 a.m., firing her main battery at Red Beach with spotting planes circling overhead. *Blue Ridge* was manoeuvring into the control anchorage just north of Mariquit-daquit Island, and Tarbuck recorded

gray smoke plumes rising from the shore and shell splashes rising between the ships and the shore. Battleship *Mississippi* is now working on the northern beaches. She is joined by *Maryland* whose fire has apparently caused a large shore explosion. . . . Battleships move close inshore and continue their constant thunder. Helldivers and Avengers [dive-bombing aircraft] from our escort carriers are heading towards the shore. Landing craft are swimming out of the LSD's. AKA's are hoisting out trucks, amphibious tractors and field guns. Anchored off Red Beach. Bombardment still in progress. HMAS *Australia* opened fire. The Hydrographic Unit has planted red and black buoys on shoal spots.

At 9.10 Tarbuck observed that hundreds of small boats were headed towards the beaches, flanked by rocket boats and destroyers. The first wave was going in. At 9.58 "thousands of rockets hit the beach with the rumble of an earthquake. It is impossible to distinguish one explosion from another. It is just a roar."

*Shropshire's* diarist found "the thunderous rumble of these rockets was unbelievable, and resembled perhaps what a machine gun firing 5-inch or 6-inch shells would sound like".

*Australia* and *Shropshire* passed through the battleship line and opened fire on their assigned targets promptly at the scheduled hour of 9 a.m., as did *Phoenix* and *Boise*. Twenty-five minutes later the destroyers joined in. After the landing at 10 a.m. *Shropshire*, *Arunta* and *Warramunga* were assigned set target areas while the other cruisers and destroyers engaged targets of opportunity and answered calls for fire. Intermittent bombardments were carried out all day, with occasional interludes. *Shropshire's* company "were pleasantly surprised during the afternoon to hear the pipe Cooks of Action Messes muster at the canteen for issue of gophers [the sailors' lolly water or soft drink]. Apparently some kindly soul, rumoured to be the padre, had shouted for the Ship's Company."

In the afternoon of A-day, 20th October, General MacArthur—who, with some members of his staff had sailed up from Hollandia in the cruiser *Nashville*—landed at Beach Red in the northern area. He stepped from a barge knee-deep into the water off the beach, waded ashore, and after inspecting the damage done by the bombardment, made a brief speech beginning with the words: "People of the Philippines, I have returned." It was the fulfilment of the promise he made two-and-a-half years earlier at Terowie, South Australia, on 20th March 1942, soon after his arrival

in Australia from Corregidor and Bataan, when he told newspapermen from Adelaide: "You can say I came out of Bataan and I shall return."<sup>8</sup>

By evening of the 20th, when the Australian cruisers and destroyers took up positions in the Fire Support Area assigned by Admiral Berkeley, the transports of Barbey's Northern Attack Force had completed unloading. Those at Beach Red landed 6,750 tons of supplies, those at Beach White 4,500 tons. Total figures for the day, including cargoes of 11 L.S.T's on Beach Red and of 14 L.S.T's on Beach White, were 18,150 troops and 13,500 tons of supplies. On shore the army attained its objectives. And Admiral Barbey's three groups—Panaon, Palo, and San Ricardo—had successfully carried out their mission for the day.

While they were doing so, Admiral Wilkinson's TF.79 was equally successful at the southern—Dulag—beaches. The combined Task Force, which had proceeded as one unit after the junction of the Hollandia and Manus groups on 15th October, broke up into its various components on arrival at the gulf. Transports of TF.79 were in their transport areas between 8 a.m. and 8.30 a.m. on the 20th. Landings followed an intensive bombardment by battleships *Tennessee*, *California*, *Pennsylvania*, cruisers and destroyers, and the initial advance of the troops inland was rapid. Assault waves and reserve battalions were landed in the morning, and in the afternoon general unloading began. This was slowed—so that less was landed than anticipated—by some enemy mortar fire which scored hits on beached L.S.T's. Assault tonnage landed on the 20th totalled 6,314 tons, of which 1,441 tons was from L.S.T's.

In the afternoon Seventh Fleet suffered its second Leyte casualty when the cruiser *Honolulu*, one of the ships of Oldendorf's Fire Support Unit South, was torpedoed by a Japanese torpedo bomber which made a surprise attack. *Honolulu*, standing by to deliver call fire after completing her bombardment schedule at noon, was swinging ship with the engines when the aircraft dropped its torpedo. *Honolulu* went full astern but time was insufficient and the torpedo struck on the port side just forward of the bridge. It tore a large jagged hole in the ship's side, killed 60 officers and men, and did considerable destruction on board. The ship was saved, but was out of the fight.

By nightfall on A-day, the Southern Attack Force controlled the coast of Leyte over the three-mile stretch from the Liberanan River just north of Beach Orange, to the mouth of the Marabang River, south of Beach Yellow; and XXIV Corps was ready to convert the amphibious phase into a land campaign.

#### IV

Trafalgar Day, 21st October, dawned badly for the Royal Australian Navy at Leyte. The Japanese made every use of the half light of dawn and dusk for air attack, and, at 6 a.m. this day, *Shropshire* engaged a dive

<sup>8</sup> In a statement he made on that occasion, MacArthur said: "The President of the United States ordered me to break through the Japanese lines, and to proceed from Corregidor to Australia for the purpose, as I understand it, of organising the American offensive against the Japanese. A primary purpose of this is the relief of the Philippines. I came through, and I shall return."

bomber which made a sudden appearance between her and *Australia*, lying a short distance away inshore of *Shropshire*. The aircraft dived at *Shropshire* but was apparently put off by the heavy barrage which that ship put up. It pulled out of its dive and flew very close off *Shropshire*'s starboard quarter at a height of about 50 feet, and losing altitude. It came under fire from the after Bofors gun, and observers in *Shropshire* claimed that the aircraft was hit, and that one of its wheels dipped in the water. It retired to the westward, but "it then turned east again and, although under heavy fire, passed up the port side of *Australia* and crashed into the foremast at 0605".<sup>9</sup> *Australia* was thus the first Allied ship to be hit by a suicide aircraft.<sup>10</sup>

An observer in *Australia* said that

the plane, a Val [Aichi 99, Navy single engine dive bomber] was one of a small group which had appeared out of the dark of a western land horizon in the first light of dawn. All were engaged briefly as they flew overhead, and were lost in the half light. Our Val was next seen diving at an angle of 10 to 15 degrees from almost directly astern and at a visibility range of perhaps 2,000 yards. Because of the stern approach the 8-barrelled pom-poms would not bear, although one of them managed to jump the safety training stops and get away a few rounds at an angle of sight of about 45 degrees or above. Apart from this fire, two single 40-mm using eye shooting, and two single 20s with Mark XIV sights, engaged the enemy with no appreciable result, although the pilot's aim was slightly upset, so that he hit the foremast with his wing root and went on over the side, instead of falling on board and adding to the fires.

The resulting fierce petrol fires in the Air Defence position and directors, and the small explosions on the compass platform, probably caused by cannon shell from the aircraft, seriously damaged gunnery and radar equipment in the vicinity and killed or injured the majority of the bridge and control personnel. The loss of so many skilled personnel made the ship virtually useless as a fighting unit, and, whilst repairs were being effected, new crews had to be trained. There seems little evidence that this plane carried a bomb, although it may have been dropped on another target before we were attacked.

This observer remarked that though at the time there were people who believed that the aircraft crashed on *Australia* by mistake, "among those of us who saw the incident, there was no doubt as to the pilot's suicidal intentions".

Another observer in *Australia*, a communication number on the ship's starboard Pom-Pom phones,<sup>1</sup> confirms the impression that there was no doubt as to the suicidal intent of the Japanese pilot.

Of a sudden I heard somebody shout and looking up I saw the first plane pulling out of his dive with machine-guns blazing out of the wings. He was so low I saw his bomb released and instinctively ducked. The bomb landed ten feet from the bows and never exploded. By this time all hands were at their guns.

<sup>9</sup> Squadron Report, 30th September to 31st October 1944.

<sup>10</sup> According to the American Naval Historian, isolated instances of Japanese pilots crashing aircraft on ships when bombs missed or the aircraft was badly damaged had been observed since 1942, and the attack on *Australia* was in this category, and was not an organised Kamikaze attack. The Kamikaze—"Heavenly Wind"—sacrificial crashing as definite tactics was first used four days after the *Australia* attack in the attacks on escort carriers *Santee* and *Suwannee* on 25th October. (Morison, Vol XII, pp. 148 (footnote) and 166.)

<sup>1</sup> AB R. W. Edmonds, PA4078.

As the second plane came in he strafed us with both machine-gun and cannon and we opened fire. Our gun hit him once and set the plane on fire—this was at 90 degrees starboard. He still came on and by the time he reached 135 degrees starboard the fire had gone out. All this time we were firing into him. He turned over our stern and came straight down for us. We (the Pom-Pom) again poured shells into him and then the whole plane became a mass of flames, but he came straight on at us with all machine-guns blazing and released an anti-personnel bomb (spattering shrapnel in all directions) and then crashed into the forebridge. The other plane was also shot down by the Pom-Pom. Another was downed by the 4-inch. *Shropshire* says we shot down four, but no gun claims a fourth.

In *Shropshire*, Midshipman Francis recorded that

*Australia* at this time was lying stopped in a position somewhat closer to the shore. The visibility had slightly improved and I could see a Val diving in for an attack. The angle of the dive was about 45 degrees. The next minute there was a livid flash in the vicinity of the 273 [radar] and DCT [Director Control Tower] which were just a mass of flame. There were several small fires alongside in the water. The situation was obscure at first but the correct assumption was that the Val had hit and bent part of the mast, knocked out the 273 tower and damaged the DCT. The Captain and Navigator were killed, the Commodore severely wounded, with seven more fatal casualties and another 75 suffering from burns of various degree.

Some *Shropshire* observers thought that the aircraft which first attacked them was not the one which subsequently attacked *Australia*, and Captain Tarbuck in *Blue Ridge* thought three were involved in the attack on the Australian flagship. He recorded:

Three enemy planes strafe HMAS *Australia* within a few hundred yards of this ship. Two are shot down but the third one dives into her foremast. Her bridge structure is ablaze and the sheerlegs of her mast are broken. Our doctor returns on board with the information that Commodore Collins has been wounded and the ship's captain killed.

Captain Nichols in *Shropshire* who, with Collins out of action, assumed the duties of CTU.77.3.2 and CTF.74, stated that only one aircraft was involved:

During the dawn stand-to a low flying aircraft approached from the land between *Australia* and *Shropshire*. It was taken under fire and retired to the westward. Observers in *Shropshire* report that the aircraft was hit and touched the water but recovered. It then turned east again and although under heavy fire, passed up the port side of *Australia*, and crashed into the foremast at 0605. There was a large explosion and an intense fire was started in the Air Defence position and bridge. Type 273 Radar Hut and lantern fell on to the compass platform, both H.A. Directors and D.C.T. were put out of action, and the port strut of the foremast was broken. The fire was brought under control very quickly and by 0635 the large quantity of wreckage on the compass platform and A.D.P. had been cleared away. Commodore J. A. Collins suffered burns and wounds; Captain E. F. V. Dechaineux and Commander J. F. Rayment<sup>2</sup> were mortally wounded. As far as is known at present the following casualties were sustained: killed or died of wounds, 3 officers, 3 ratings, 4 unidentified; wounded, 16 officers, 49 ratings.

These preliminary figures did not show the full extent of the casualties.

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<sup>2</sup> Cdr J. F. Rayment, DSC; RAN. HMAS *Australia* 1918, 1939-44. Of Cremorne, NSW; b. Leichhardt, NSW, 20 Aug 1900. Died of wounds 21 Oct 1944.

Thirty officers and men were killed or died of wounds<sup>3</sup> and 64 officers and men were wounded, 26 seriously.

A first report of the damage suffered by *Australia* was made to Vice-Admiral Kinkaid, Rear-Admiral Barbey and Rear-Admiral Berkey, and Commander Wright assumed command of *Australia*, and the ship's emergency conning position took over. The Staff Officer (Operations) and Commodore's Staff transferred to *Shropshire*. At 11 a.m. *Australia*, screened by *Warramunga*, was ordered by Kinkaid to join the damaged *Honolulu* in the Southern Transport Area off Dulag, and at 1.14 p.m. the three ships sailed for Kossol Passage, Palau Islands—the destroyer screen being supplemented during the afternoon by American destroyer *Richard P. Leary*.<sup>4</sup> The force cleared Leyte Gulf at 8 p.m. on the 21st, and entered Kossol at 10 a.m. on the 24th. That afternoon *Australia* and *Warramunga* sailed for Manus, which was reached in the early morning of 27th October. *Australia*'s wounded were landed at Kossol Roads and at Manus for hospital treatment. At Manus, Captain Armstrong—formerly N.O.I.C. New Guinea—assumed command of *Australia*, and on 28th October the ship sailed for Espiritu Santo, where repairs were effected with such dispatch that by 28th November she was ready to sail to rejoin the Task Group.

During the next two or three days consolidation and build-up progressed in the Leyte operation. *Shropshire* and *Arunta* stood by in the fire support area "D", south of Beach Red, to answer calls for fire during the daylight hours, and at night patrolled to the eastward of the transport area. On the 21st Dulag and Palo were occupied, and that afternoon Tacloban fell to the invaders, and Lieut-General F. C. Sibert, U.S. Army, commanding X Corps, relieved Barbey of command of the northern operations. In the forenoon of the 23rd, at the municipal building in Tacloban, General MacArthur—who was accompanied by President Sergio Osmena of the Philippines—broadcast an address setting up the Free Philippines Civil Government, with Osmena as its legal president under the supreme authority of the United States. The national flag of the Philippine Commonwealth (made for the occasion by the sailmaker's mate of U.S.S. *Nashville*) was hoisted together with the colours of the United States.

On the 24th, when 144,800 Americans and 244,440 tons of supplies had been landed on Leyte, the Japanese made the heaviest air raids so far attempted in their opposition to the Leyte attack. It was estimated

<sup>3</sup> Those killed or died of wounds were: *Officers*—Captain Dechaineux, RAN; Commander Rayment, RAN; Lieut-Commander H. B. Gerrett, RAN; Lieutenants G. J. Greig, RAN, H. B. Bayley, RANR and I. M. Jones, RANVR(NZ); Sub-Lieutenant I. K. Debenham, RANR. *Ratings*—Able Seaman M. Buckland, PM6014; Ldg Seaman R. J. Cornish, 23732; Able Seaman H. P. Eller, 14621; Able Seaman J. N. Erwin, S6904; Able Seaman G. K. Fenton, H2118; Able Seaman E. S. Fontaine, PM4828; Able Seaman V. L. Hansen, S7238; Able Seaman J. W. Hocking, PM6289; Ordinary Seaman R. Hocking, PA4406; Ordinary Seaman R. S. Hookins, PM7168; Chief Petty Officer G. F. Hutchinson, 13263; Able Seaman R. Irvine, S8206; Able Seaman A. R. Maunsell, S5801; Able Seaman F. G. Miller, 18125; Able Seaman R. J. Parkinson, PM2686; Able Seaman F. P. Perrin, 14288; Leading Seaman D. Pittendrigh, F3746; Ordinary Seaman C. P. Potter, PM7170; Able Seaman N. A. Rattray, 24493; Ordinary Seaman R. H. Sharpe, F5175; Able Seaman F. F. Spurr, S6949; Able Seaman R. M. Steele, PA2854; Able Seaman F. G. Stephenson, B3634.

<sup>4</sup> *Richard P. Leary*, US destroyer (1944), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

in *Shropshire* that about 80 to 100 aircraft approached from the north-westward, but only 20 or 30 penetrated to the transport area, and eight of these were seen to be shot down by defending fighters. In *Blue Ridge* Tarbuck watched

eight to ten enemy bombers fly over dropping two bombs between *Blue Ridge* and *Shropshire*, no hits. . . . Enemy dive bombers launch an attack on the starboard bow. . . . *Shropshire* and a destroyer commence firing, and the aircraft are turning away. Fighter pilots can be heard "tally-hoing" the enemy. Three planes fall burning, one crashed on shore. One LCI bursts into flames from a hit of suicide plane crash. One Liberty ship is hit by a bomb. There is too much smoke to identify ships now, and the burning oil smoke of the LCI rises 5,000 feet, flames about 200 feet.

That afternoon reports of the sighting of a Japanese task force of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers in the eastern Sulu Sea indicated that an attempt might be made to force Surigao Strait from the south. Kinkaid ordered the Bombardment and Fire Support Group (TG.77.2) and Berkey's Close Covering Group (TG.77.3) to cover the southern entrance of Surigao Strait and to destroy any enemy ships attempting to force an entrance. Thirty P.T. boats were also assigned to the task.

The possibility of a Japanese attempt to outflank the invasion forces by a thrust through Surigao Strait had been foreseen before the invasion. A South-West Pacific Headquarters staff study, "Japanese Fleet Possibilities, King-Two Operation"<sup>5</sup> of 4th October stressed the likelihood. The study detailed the components of the Japanese Fleet, split into two major parts of the carrier forces, which "can be dismissed as kept out of KING-TWO operation by the U.S. 3rd Fleet", and "Jutland-organised task forces comprising four fast battleships, two slow battleships, 12 heavy cruisers, four light cruisers, and 27 destroyers". This "Jutland-organised" group said the study, was divided into a *1st Diversion Attack Force* of seven heavy and one light cruiser and 12 destroyers; and a *2nd Diversion Attack Force* of four fast battleships, five heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, 15 destroyers, with a replenishment group escort of two slow battleships and two older cruisers.

It was in the *1st Diversion Attack Force*, said the study, where lay the surface danger to the KING-TWO amphibious forces:

It is a typical Tokyo Express based at Brunei Bay, at present out of range of land-based and sea-borne air, but within striking distance of the landing force area. . . . That force already has received a directive to attack the invasion force at night. Since the KING-TWO landing is a frontal attack, four divisions abreast, the Surigao Strait when unsecured presents an exposed flank. If our bombardment forces retire to seaward at night Surigao Strait becomes an open back door. It must be assumed therefore that the Japanese *2nd Diversion Attack Force* (battleships) will attempt to create diversions which are calculated to draw off our slow battleships, and our cruisers and destroyers, from screening positions in the vicinity of Surigao Strait.

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<sup>5</sup> Signed by Captain Ray Tarbuck as the senior naval adviser permanently attached to General Headquarters, and chairman of the committee which drafted the original and first revision of the KING-TWO plan.

The study concluded that an enemy night striking force was poised to attack KING-TWO through Surigao Strait, that the strait should be forced and secured by the Americans as soon as they had secured control of the air, and that surface forces superior to the enemy's *1st Diversion Attack Force* should be maintained within intercepting distance of that force regardless of larger fleet movements.

The study was a sound appreciation of what could happen, and a close approximation of what did happen. In the event it was wrong in dismissing the Japanese carrier force as "kept out of KING-TWO operations by the U.S. 3rd Fleet". As a powerful air striking force it was kept out of KING-TWO by its lack of aircraft and of adequately trained air crews. But, in Ozawa's Northern Force, it was represented at Leyte by the "decoy" force which, with its threat of air attack, seduced Halsey with his Third Fleet carriers and battleships away from Leyte Gulf, to leave that open to a combined attack by both the *1st* and *2nd Japanese Diversion Attack Forces*.

As stated above, on 15th October Halsey informed MacArthur that he was deploying Third Fleet for action (to the north of the Philippines) and that no further support for the Leyte operation could be expected until the situation cleared. This signal caused concern in South-West Pacific Headquarters (where MacArthur was about to embark in *Nashville* for Leyte) and in the evening of the 15th MacArthur sent a signal to Nimitz at Pearl Harbour suggesting that consideration be given to the thought that the *2nd Diversion Attack Force* might be the bulk of enemy surface strength in the South China Sea—Singapore area, consisting of 6 battleships, 12 heavy cruisers, 4 light cruisers and 20 destroyers, representing practically all of the enemy's available surface strength. General Headquarters also suggested that this force would sortie through San Bernardino Strait or Surigao Strait. G.H.Q. warned Pacific Fleet that the left flank at Leyte was unguarded, and that should the Japanese battle line appear there when Third Fleet was beyond intercepting distance, the result would be disastrous.

An Australian naval officer played a part in the originating of this signal. Pay-Lieutenant Connor<sup>6</sup> was Naval Staff Officer (Intelligence), Combined Operations Intelligence Centre at MacArthur's headquarters. His special duty was the collation, appreciation and interpretation of Intelligence of Japanese naval dispositions, regarding which he, over a period of months, made a daily personal report to MacArthur. It was found that interpretation of identical Intelligence available to Pearl Harbour and to G.H.Q., S.W.P.A. often differed, and that while Pearl Harbour believed that the greater proportion of Japanese naval strength was in northern waters, G.H.Q., S.W.P.A. believed that it was at Singapore. This difference in assessment now obtruded itself at a crucial moment. Connor felt so strongly about the Halsey signal, that he sent a memo to General Sutherland stressing the evidence that the major Japanese force was in southern waters, and

<sup>6</sup> Lt-Cdr G. J. Connor, VRD; RANVR. NSO(Int), COIC 1940-41, GHQ SWPA 1942-45. Stock and share broker; of Melbourne; b. Clifton Hill, Vic, 21 Jan 1913.



that the menace it presented necessitated the availability of Third Fleet if it were adequately to be controlled. He recalled after the war:

I remember the incident vividly because of the urgency for some action, particularly in view of General MacArthur's leaving that night for Leyte. I sent my memo to General Sutherland that evening. After dinner I was called to GHQ, verbally to expand the argument in the memo. This I did to General MacArthur and General Sutherland, after which General MacArthur dictated the signal to Pacific Fleet.

It is difficult to reconcile this with the statements that G.H.Q., S.W.P.A. anticipated but slight possibility of strong Japanese naval reaction to the landings. The American naval historian remarks that

on A-day itself General MacArthur's headquarters issued a broadsheet headed "Enemy Capabilities of Naval Reaction to Allied Landings on the Philippines", in which it was confidently stated that an approach of the Japanese Fleet through Surigao or San Bernardino Straits would be "impracticable because of navigational hazards and the lack of manoeuvring space". On A-day plus 1, the South-West Pacific Intelligence Summary announced that there was "no apparent intent" of the Japanese Navy "to interfere with our Leyte landings". And Admiral Kinkaid, from his flagship in Leyte Gulf during the small hours of 23 October, sent out a dispatch stating that he regarded the approach of Japanese warships to Coron Bay as the beginning of "Tokyo Express" runs, and that there was a possibility of enemy carrier planes operating from west of Palawan.<sup>7</sup>

It is equally difficult to reconcile the above with the fact that CTF.77, Kinkaid, had, in the words of CTG.77.2, Oldendorf, "clearly visualised the enemy capabilities", and took steps to counter them. In his report of the Battle of Surigao Strait, Oldendorf wrote:

For a number of days prior to this action many reports had been received concerning the movement of Japanese surface forces. It was understood that the Japanese were putting into effect a plan for the relief of the Philippines and that enemy surface forces were probably about to attack our forces in Leyte Gulf. Mindful of the Japanese activities in the Visayan area, Commander Task Group 77.2 had decided on 22nd October that it would be wise to take precautionary dispositions in the vicinity of Leyte Gulf with particular emphasis on Surigao Strait, south, and had issued a directive to his forces directing them to take stations with light forces initially located on an east-west line four miles east of Taytay Point, on course east, speed 5 knots, and with heavy forces plus destroyer screen located to the northward in area Drum south of latitude 10 degrees 46 mins north. The directive for Task Group 77.2 to remain in an area of latitude 10 degrees 46 mins north had come originally from Commander Task Force 77, who had evidently clearly visualised the enemy capabilities.<sup>8</sup>

## V

It will be recalled that in the preliminaries to the Battle of the Philippine Sea in June 1944, the American submarines played an important part both in reconnaissance and in action, while the Japanese submarines failed to achieve anything. So it was in the battle for Leyte. With the mission of

<sup>7</sup> Morison, Vol XII, p. 72.

<sup>8</sup> Oldendorf, Preliminary Action Report for Battle of Surigao Strait. Dated 2 Nov 1944. Filed 7th Fleet A16-3(2) SWPA ops 1-5 Nov 1944.

intercepting the invaders before they reached their target, fifteen Japanese submarines were stationed off the Leyte area—but not until 24th October. They had only one success, the sinking by *I 45* of the American destroyer escort *Eversole*<sup>9</sup> on 29th October. As at the Battle of the Philippine Sea, the American submarines, both in reconnaissance and action, had notable achievements. And again it was they that gave the first definite Intelligence of the movements of the main Japanese forces.

Some 40 American submarines operated in the western Pacific at this period. Concentrated in the area between Japan and the Philippines were 26 boats of Submarines Pacific Fleet, under the command of Vice-Admiral Lockwood, and operating from Pearl Harbour. At strategic points in the South-West Pacific were 14 boats of Submarines South-West Pacific under the command of Rear-Admiral Christie, and based on Brisbane and Fremantle. Four were in the Palawan Passage area, and others were west of northern Palawan, off Brunei Bay, at the north end of Macassar Strait, the inner end of Surigao Strait, off Manila, and along the north-west coast of Luzon.

On 1st October two of the Fremantle-based boats, *Darter*<sup>1</sup> and *Dace*, left Mios Wundi for a patrol of Palawan Passage, the 25-mile-wide channel between Palawan Island and unsurveyed Dangerous Ground to the westward. Palawan, a long, narrow island, stretches its 250 miles of length north-east from the northern point of Borneo—from which it is separated by Balabac Strait—to Coron Island, betwixt which and Mindoro Island, farther to the north-east, is Mindoro Strait. The two submarines were in company off the southern entrance to Palawan Passage in the night of 22nd-23rd October.

Kurita's First Attack Force consisting of battleships *Yamato*, *Musashi*, *Nagato*, *Kongo*, *Haruna*, *Yamashiro* (flag of Vice-Admiral Nishimura) and *Fuso*; heavy cruisers *Atago* (flag of Vice-Admiral Kurita), *Takao*, *Maya*, *Chokai*, *Myoko*, *Haguro*, *Kumano*, *Suzuya*, *Chikuma*, *Tone*, and *Mogami*; light cruisers *Noshiro* and *Yahagi*, and 19 destroyers, arrived at Brunei from Lingga Roads on 20th October. Here, Kurita detached the Southern Attack Force under Nishimura. It consisted of battleships *Yamashiro* and *Fuso*; heavy cruiser *Mogami*; and destroyers *Michishio*, *Yamagumo*, *Asagumo* and *Shigure*. The two forces left Brunei on the 22nd. Nishimura, after a diversion to the northward to avoid suspected submarines, made through Balabac Strait into the Sulu Sea on his way to Surigao Strait. Kurita, with the main body, steered north-east through Palawan Passage, making for the central Philippines and San Bernardino Strait. The two forces had an appointment in Leyte Gulf on the 25th. It was not to be kept.

At 6 a.m. on 23rd October Kurita's Centre Force, in two groups separated by some 6,000 yards, was well in Palawan Passage. The force was cruising in line ahead in two columns, disposed abeam to starboard, steering

<sup>9</sup> *Eversole*, US destroyer escort (1944), 1,350 tons, two 5-in guns, three 21-in torpedo tubes, 24 kts. Sunk off Leyte 29 Oct 1944.

<sup>1</sup> *Darter*, US submarine (1943), 1,526 tons, one gun (3- to 5-in), ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 20 kts. Ran ashore, and abandoned 24 Oct 1944.

north-easterly at 16 knots and zigzagging. In the leading group *Atago* led the port column, followed by *Takao*, *Chokai*, and *Nagato*. In the second group the port column was continued in the order *Kumano*, *Suzuya*, *Haruna*. *Myoko* led the starboard column, followed by *Haguro*, *Maya*, *Yamato*, *Musashi*, and, in the second group, *Tone*, *Chikuma*, and *Kongo*. The light cruisers and destroyers screened on the outside of each column, and three destroyers were in column between the two main columns. But Kurita had neglected to station destroyers ahead of his disposition. This was a costly omission, since *Darter* and *Dace*, which had contacted the force soon after one o'clock that morning and had hastened at 19 knots throughout the night to get into position for attack, were now some 20,000 yards dead ahead, undetected.

At 6.32 a.m., when the Japanese had just completed a turn to port, *Darter* fired her bow torpedoes at *Atago* at a range of only 980 yards, and a minute later attacked *Takao* with her stern tubes. Hit by four torpedoes, *Atago* sank at 6.53 with the loss of 360 officers and men. Kurita and his staff were taken off by the destroyer *Kishinami* (2,100 tons) and later in the day transferred to *Yamato*. *Takao*, hit by two torpedoes, had her rudder and two propellers blown off, and three boiler rooms flooded. She remained afloat, but had to return to Brunei. About ten minutes after *Darter's* attack, *Dace*, from a position broad on the port bow of the starboard column, secured four torpedo hits on the third ship in the column, heavy cruiser *Maya*, which sank almost immediately.<sup>2</sup>

The two submarines survived depth-charge attacks by the escorting Japanese destroyers, but at 1.5 a.m. on the 24th, when they were manoeuvring in company to make another attack on Kurita's force, *Darter* ran ashore on Bombay Shoal, a coral reef on the China side of the passage. After unavailing efforts to get her off, she was abandoned. *Dace*, with her company swelled to a total of 155 officers and men with the addition of *Darter's* complement, returned to Fremantle.

This notable success against Kurita's force paved the way for another, since the signal which *Darter* sent to Admiral Christie at the time of her attack on *Atago*, was relayed by Christie to Admiral Halsey at 6.20 that morning, and gave the Americans the first definite information they had about the Japanese fleet's position. Halsey at once disposed his carrier groups to strike against this threat; and meanwhile other enemy reports arrived. During the night of the 23rd-24th the American carrier Task Groups 38.2, 38.3 and 38.4, which had been operating about 260 miles north-east of Samar, were called in toward the coast. They were disposed with Rear-Admiral F. P. Sherman's TG.38.3 northernmost, east of Luzon; Rear-Admiral G. F. Bogan's TG.38.2 off San Bernardino Strait; and Rear-Admiral Davison's TG.38.4 off Leyte Gulf. At daybreak on the 24th the carriers launched search teams, and at 8.12 a.m. an aircraft from

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<sup>2</sup> Thus were accounted for, within a period of minutes on the morning of 23rd October 1944, three cruisers, *Atago*, *Takao*, and *Maya*, of Admiral Kondo's force which sank HMAS *Yarra* on the morning of 4th March 1942. (See *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, pp. 629-32.)

*Intrepid* in TG.38.2, sighted Kurita, then rounding the southern cape of Mindoro and entering the Sibuyan Sea. At 9.5 a.m. aircraft from *Enterprise* and *Franklin*<sup>3</sup> of TG.38.4 sighted Nishimura in the Sulu Sea, about 50 miles W.S.W. of the southernmost point of Negros Island. And at 11.55 a.m. a U.S. Army Air Force bomber picked up Shima's force of heavy cruisers *Nachi* and *Ashigara*, and light cruiser *Abukuma* and four destroyers, some 75 miles north-west of where Nishimura was sighted.<sup>4</sup> Only Ozawa's Northern Force, making down from Japan and then some 200 miles due east of Luzon's Cape Engano, was not so far located.

Halsey intercepted the Kurita sighting report and at 8.27 a.m. ordered Sherman and Davison to concentrate on Bogan's TG.38.2 off San Bernardino Strait (where his own flagship, *New Jersey*, was operating) and launch strikes. Davison did so, but about the time of Kurita's sighting heavy air attacks by Japanese land-based carrier aircraft, and later by aircraft from Ozawa's still undetected Northern Force, developed on Sherman's TG.38.3. At 9.39 a.m. the carrier *Princeton*<sup>5</sup> was hit by one bomb from a solitary dive bomber. It started a small fire on the hangar deck. The fire soon became a major conflagration, with explosions spreading it mortally. Vice-Admiral Mitscher ordered TG.38.3 to remain with the stricken ship. Throughout the day the efforts—by her own company and those of succouring ships of the task group—to save her continued, but about 3.30 p.m. on the 24th her after magazine exploded, blowing off her stern and turning the upper deck of the cruiser *Birmingham*—then alongside her—into a shambles. The weather was deteriorating, and at 5.50 p.m., on instructions from Mitscher, *Princeton* was sunk by torpedoes and gunfire.

Meanwhile, throughout the day between 10.30 a.m. and 5.30 p.m., aircraft from Bogan's and Davison's groups battered Kurita's force as it crossed the Sibuyan Sea, with Sherman's aircraft joining in from 11 a.m. Kurita had negligible air cover, since Admiral Fukudome felt that the best protection he could give with his Luzon-based aircraft was in attacking the American carriers, but the American fliers had to face intense anti-aircraft fire. The principal loss suffered by the Japanese in these attacks was that of the giant battleship *Musashi*. In the first attack, about 10.30 a.m. on the 24th, she was hit on the starboard side by three torpedoes, and about twenty minutes later suffered another five torpedo hits on the port side. From about 1 p.m. she fell astern of the main disposition, and suffered more hits in the afternoon. In all, she was hit by about 30 bombs and 26 torpedoes. An attempt was made to beach her on the north coast of Sibuyan Island, but about 7.30 p.m. the giant capsized to port and sank—with the loss of more than 1,000 of her company of 2,200. Heavy cruiser

<sup>3</sup> *Intrepid*, *Franklin*, US aircraft carriers (1943-44), 27,100 tons, twelve 5-in guns, 103 aircraft, 33 kts.

<sup>4</sup> Shima had been reported, then west of Luzon, the previous morning, by submarine *Bream*. He called in at Coron Bay to refuel, and sailed thence early on the 24th.

<sup>5</sup> *Princeton*, US aircraft carrier (1943), 11,000 tons, eighteen 40-mm guns, 33 aircraft, 32 kts. Sunk off Philippines, 24 Oct 1944.

*Myoko* was also knocked out of the fight, and had to return to Singapore; and *Yamato*, cruiser *Yahagi*, and destroyer *Kiyoshima* suffered bomb damage. But Kurita, after a brief reversal of course in the late afternoon to avoid air attack, pushed on towards his objective. So did Nishimura. He was attacked by aircraft from *Enterprise* of Davison's group at 9.5 a.m., when south of Negros Island, but suffered only minor damage.

While Kurita and Nishimura were making their separate ways towards Leyte Gulf, Ozawa's Northern Force continued its efforts to attract Halsey away from the Leyte Gulf area. When Fukudome's land-based aircraft located Sherman's TG.38.3 in the early morning of the 24th, the sighting was passed to Ozawa, then some 240 miles to the NNE of the American force, which Ozawa's search aircraft sighted at 11.15 bearing 120 degrees distance 180 miles. Half an hour later Ozawa sent off a strike of 76 aircraft to attack Sherman. Many of these were shot down, 15 or 20 made emergency landings on Luzon, and only 29 returned to Ozawa. The appearance of these carrier-borne aircraft from a sector roughly between north and north-east of Sherman suggested that a Japanese carrier force might be there. Sherman was instructed by Mitscher to launch a search, and at 4.40 p.m. on the 24th Ozawa—who meantime had been steering a box course to maintain his general geographical position—was reported, 190 miles NNE of TG.38.3.

This discovery of the Japanese carrier force placed the onus of a heavy decision on Admiral Halsey. His reaction to the sighting, coupled with the information he had received about Kurita's and Nishimura's forces, the American naval historian suggested, "can best be stated in the words of his own dispatch to Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur at about 2200 October 25, after the battle was over". In this dispatch Halsey said:

Searches by my carrier planes revealed the presence of the Northern carrier force on the afternoon of 24 October, which completed the picture of all enemy naval forces. As it seemed childish to me to guard statically San Bernardino Strait, I concentrated TF38 during the night and steamed north to attack the Northern Force at dawn. I believed that the Center Force had been so heavily damaged in the Sibuyan Sea that it could no longer be considered a serious menace to Seventh Fleet.<sup>6</sup>

Halsey thus fell for the Ozawa bait, and at 8.22 p.m. on the 24th ordered the three carrier groups to steam north and attack Ozawa. Meanwhile the fourth air group of TF.38, Vice-Admiral McCain's TG.38.1, which was returning from Ulithi where it had been to replenish, was ordered to join the others. By midnight on the 24th, Halsey himself in *New Jersey*, with the three fast carrier groups and all their battleships and cruisers, was proceeding north at 16 knots, leaving unguarded San Bernardino Strait whence Kurita, with his still powerful fleet, was just about to emerge, while away to the southwards Nishimura was driving northwards through Surigao Strait towards the Seventh Fleet forces there disposed to bar his passage.

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<sup>6</sup> Morison, Vol XII, p. 193.

## VI

At midnight on 24th October 1944, the Allied and Japanese naval forces in the Philippines were widely spread, with all the potentials for three separate battles. Farthest north, in an area about 200 miles SE by E of Luzon's Cape Engano, was Ozawa's force of *CarDiv Three*—one fleet carrier and 3 light carriers with a total of 29 aircraft; 2 converted battleship carriers with no aircraft; 3 light cruisers and 9 destroyers. Northbound, south of Ozawa some 180 miles, was Halsey with Third Fleet's three fast carrier task groups of a total of 5 fleet carriers and 5 light carriers, 6 battleships, 2 heavy and 6 light cruisers, and 41 destroyers. Some 150 miles south-west of Halsey, Kurita, with 4 battleships, including the giant *Yamato*, 6 heavy and 2 light cruisers, and 15 destroyers, was just emerging from San Bernardino Strait. Around 150 miles from Kurita, off the east coast of Samar Island, were the northernmost ships (TU.77.4.3) of TG.77.4, Rear-Admiral Thomas Sprague's Escort Carrier Group, whose 16 escort carriers, with their screens totalling 9 destroyers and 12 destroyer escorts, were disposed in three groups some 50 miles apart off Samar, off Leyte Gulf, and off Mindanao. Their primary task was to provide air support for the amphibious forces, and maintain anti-submarine patrols. Each carrier was armed with one 5-inch gun, and carried 12 to 18 "Wildcat" fighter aircraft and 12 torpedo bombers. And beyond these northern escort carriers, some 100 miles farther south and west, was Leyte Gulf, with a rich harvest for the reaping<sup>7</sup> if the approaching Japanese could get in among it. And, 90 miles or so south of that harvest field, also bound for it to share in the reaping, Nishimura's force of 2 battleships, one heavy cruiser and 4 destroyers, off Bohol Island, was approaching Surigao Strait unaware that waiting for him at its northern gateway was the Seventh Fleet Fire Support Unit and Close Covering Force—a stopper in the bottleneck which was to bar his passage and substitute an appointment with death for that he had in Leyte Gulf with Kurita.

## VII

The battle which resulted from the barring of Nishimura's passage through Surigao Strait was the first of the three to be fought. On 22nd October Rear-Admiral Oldendorf, CTG.77.2, directed his forces to take precautionary dispositions in the vicinity of Leyte Gulf to the south of latitude 10 degrees 46 minutes north, as instructed by Kinkaid, with particular emphasis on Surigao Strait. When the TG.38.4 aircraft sighted Nishimura off Negros on the 24th, Kinkaid, at 3.13 p.m. that day, directed Oldendorf to prepare for a night engagement, and to take under his command TG.77.3 in addition to TG.77.2 for this action. Because of his preoccupation with the possibility of a Japanese attack through Surigao

<sup>7</sup> There were in San Pedro Bay, Leyte Gulf, 28 Liberty ships, the three amphibious force flagships—*Blue Ridge*, *Fremont*, and *Hughes*, and USS *Nashville* with General MacArthur on board. They were screened by destroyer escorts and patrol craft. At 3 p.m. on 24th October, Tarbuck, in *Blue Ridge*, recorded that "a quick count showed 141 ships in the Gulf, LCI's or larger".

Strait, Oldendorf had already formulated his battle plan. This—covering a Japanese entrance both to Surigao Strait south (between Leyte and Dinagat) and Surigao Strait east (between Hibuson Island and Dinagat)—was speedily drawn up.

The Allied forces were disposed in the northern part of Surigao Strait to avoid the restricted waters farther south, and were deployed at about latitude 10 degrees 30 minutes north, in a rough crescent concave to the southward. The battle line was composed of *Mississippi* (Flag of Rear-Admiral Weyler), *West Virginia*, *Maryland*, *Tennessee*, *California*, *Pennsylvania*, with screen of six destroyers. It was to steam east and west at five knots along a line of about eleven miles, reversing course at each end. The flank forces maintained station on the battle line. The left flank—the stronger of the two because of the increased danger from Surigao Strait east—was composed of *Louisville* (Oldendorf's Flagship), *Portland*, *Minneapolis*, *Denver*, *Columbia*, and nine destroyers. The right flank was of *Phoenix* (Flag of Rear-Admiral Berkey), *Boise*, H.M.A.S. *Shropshire*, and six destroyers, including H.M.A.S. *Arunta*. An additional five destroyers of Destroyer Squadron 54, which was on station patrolling across Surigao Strait south, reported to Oldendorf, and moved into position on the right flank. During the afternoon of the 24th, Oldendorf held a conference with Weyler and Berkey in *Louisville*, and details of the battle plan—in which they enthusiastically concurred—were settled. Because of shortage of ammunition, and the necessity for a high percentage of hits and high fire effect by the battleships, it was decided that their range should be between 17,000 and 20,000 yards.

Disposed down the Strait and into the Mindanao Sea were 39 P.T. boats of Seventh Fleet's Torpedo Boat Squadrons. They patrolled and watched the southern approaches of Surigao Strait, from the southernmost line through the Mindanao Sea from Bohol Island to Kamigin Island, up the approaches to the vicinity of Leyte's south-eastern bulge. It was from the P.T. boats that the first sightings were made of the approaching Japanese that night, and the first attacks on the enemy were made.

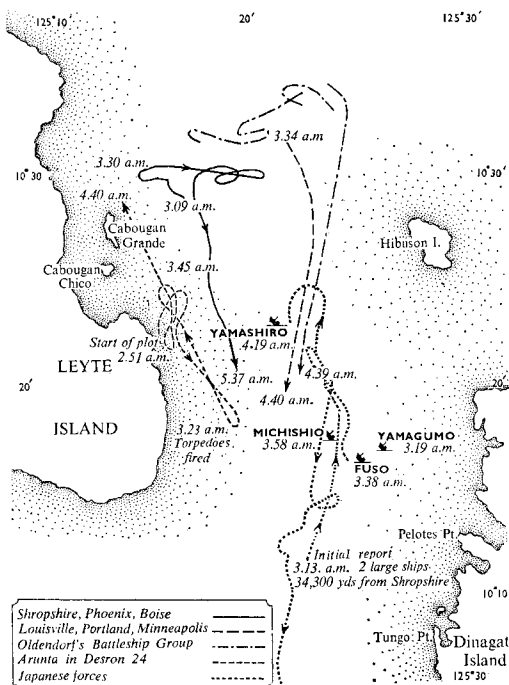
At 9.5 a.m. on the 24th the TG.38.4 aircraft sighted and attacked Nishimura in the Sulu Sea off Negros Island. That was the last definite news of him received by Oldendorf until half an hour after midnight that night. At 10.36 p.m. on the 24th, *PT131*, of the southernmost group of P.T. boats, picked up Nishimura's flag group on radar between Bohol and Kamigin Islands. It consisted of the two battleships and *Shigure*, since an hour and a half earlier Nishimura had detached *Mogami* and the other three destroyers to reconnoitre ahead. They did so as far as Panaon Island, and rejoined Nishimura at 11.30 p.m. *PT131*'s section of three boats attacked, but were unable to get within torpedo range. Taken under gunfire by *Shigure*, they suffered casualties, and had radio apparatus knocked out so that they were unable to get the sighting report away. It was eventually relayed by *PT127* of Section 2 of the P.T.'s, and reached Oldendorf at 12.26 a.m. on 25th October. Nishimura was proceeding at 18

knots, and on the reconnaissance group rejoining he formed his battle line in line ahead, in the order *Michishio*, *Asagumo*, *Yamagumo*, *Shigure*, *Yamashiro*, *Fuso*, *Mogami*. Some 30 miles astern of him was Shima (who, it will be recalled, was sighted by an American Army Air Force bomber at 11.55 a.m. on the 24th about 120 miles west of Negros) with his two heavy and one light cruisers and four destroyers.

The night was clear and dark. There was no wind. The sea was flat calm with no swell. Visibility at the American line of battle was two to three miles without night glasses, but was almost zero against the land. At seven minutes past midnight the moon set. As the battle line and its flanking forces steamed slowly east and west across the Strait—there 12 miles wide—reports of the advancing Japanese followed that of *PT127*, marking their progress up the Strait. In succession the P.T. boat sections attacked, reported, were illuminated by Japanese searchlights and were targets for enemy gunfire (gun flashes from Nishimura's ships were seen by those in Shima's group following up astern). The last P.T. boat attack on Nishimura was delivered at 2.13 a.m. on the 25th. At 2.25 a.m. he was reported as midway between Dinagat and Panaon Islands, towards the last named's northern end; and the five destroyers of Destroyer Squadron 54 (Captain J. G. Coward, U.S.N.) moved in to attack.

At about this time Shima was off the southern end of Panaon Island, pursuing his course astern of the main body. The tide was running north, and he was set too close to the shore and had to alter course to the eastward. When he resumed his original course he assumed battle disposition with his fleet in column in the order *Nachi*, *Ashigara*, *Abukuma*, and the four destroyers.

For half an hour or so after the attack on him at 2.13 a.m., Nishimura had a peaceful time. Then, at 2.56 a.m., lookouts in *Shigure* reported three ships distant 4.3 miles. They were destroyers of Coward's Squadron



Battle of Surigao Strait, 25th October 1944



54 which, in two groups, three on the eastern side of the Strait and two on the western, were speeding south at 20 knots to the attack. At about 3 a.m. the eastern group attacked, and fired a total of 27 torpedoes at ranges of 8,000 to 9,000 yards. The three destroyers swung hard to port under fire from *Yamashiro* and Japanese destroyers, and retired N.N.E. at 35 knots unharmed. As a result of this attack, battleship *Fuso* was hit by a torpedo, and slowed down and sheered out of column. She blew up at 3.38 a.m., and the two halves later sank. Ten minutes after this attack, the two destroyers of the western group fired torpedoes—a total of 20—with further disastrous results for the Japanese. Three of Nishimura's destroyers, *Yamagumo*, *Michishio*, and *Asagumo*, were hit. *Yamagumo* blew up and sank. ("0320-ComDesRon 54 reported scoring a hit and big flare on one ship. Flare and explosion seen by flagship", Oldendorf recorded in his "Preliminary Action Report", dated 2nd November 1944.) *Michishio*, crippled, remained afloat but was sunk about half an hour later in another destroyer attack. *Asagumo*, with her bows blown off, retired, to be sunk four hours later by American cruisers and destroyers in a one-sided gun duel. *Yamashiro* also sustained a torpedo hit in this attack by the western group of Destroyer Squadron 54, but it failed to stop her.

While the torpedoes from Coward's western group were still on the way to their targets, another destroyer attack was in the making. At 3 a.m. Rear-Admiral Berkey directed his right flank destroyers of Desron 24, to attack. They steamed south in two sections: *Hutchins* (Captain McManes, U.S.N.), *Daly* and *Bache*; and H.M.A.S. *Arunta* (Commander Buchanan, R.A.N., O.T.C.), *Killen* and *Beale*. The two groups separated at 3.10 a.m. McManes was inshore, to the west of Buchanan, who received the order to attack with torpedoes at 3.11 a.m. Since the torpedo attacks were not being supported by gunfire, Buchanan intended to reach a firing position between 6,000 and 7,000 yards on the port bow of the approaching Japanese. The approach course was SE by S, speed 25 knots. The destroyers commenced making smoke just before firing torpedoes. At 3.19 the Japanese fired starshell, and in the expectation that since he was not being engaged, a heavy column of fire would follow, Buchanan gave the order to fire torpedoes at 3.20 at a range of 7,200 yards. At 3.23 *Arunta* fired her outfit of four torpedoes at the enemy column. Her Medical Officer, Surgeon-Lieutenant Shane Watson, told of this in a diary he kept at the time:

We turned and fired our torpedoes into the darkness (being, it is believed, not more than a mile away from the enemy's destroyer screen, with which the battleships apparently at one time confused us). I was standing just abaft our tubes on port side as the torpedoes were fired and saw them all enter the water, saw through glasses two tracks in the correct general direction. We turned into our own smoke and retired at speed. I watched through glasses out astern for hits as we swung in and out of the smoke. When I saw three orange flashes in the distance well spaced and at fair time intervals I could not say if they were the correct striking time for our torpedoes. On the way out I saw another destroyer on our port quarter turn and

fire torpedoes and turn into his smoke. We picked up our two destroyers, who had fired five each and retired.

Two minutes after *Arunta* fired, *Killen* and *Beale* loosed off their torpedoes, five each. One British report records that "according to statements of Japanese prisoners of war this attack would seem to have been the most damaging of all". But apparently only one hit was secured, by *Killen* on *Yamashiro*, which "slowed her temporarily to five knots but did not stop her".<sup>8</sup>

McManes' section of Desron 24 continued south at 25 knots, reversed course, and fired 15 torpedoes at the Japanese between 3.29 a.m. and 3.36 a.m., and four minutes later opened gunfire on two damaged Japanese destroyers, *Michishio* and *Asagumo*, which were trying to retire. Hearing the gunfire, Buchanan, who had turned north after his torpedo attack, turned south again in support. Meanwhile McManes was preparing to press his attack again with torpedoes, but Admiral Berkeley at 3.49 ordered him to retire lest he fouled the range of the battleships and cruisers, now about to open fire. *Hutchins*, however, just managed to launch five torpedoes, and these hit and sank *Michishio*.

Meanwhile, at 3.30 a.m., Nishimura, then some ten miles north of the scene of the depletion of his force and apparently unaware of the loss of *Fuso*, sent his last message, to Admirals Kurita and Shima:

Urgent Battle Report No. 2. Enemy torpedo boats and destroyers present on both sides of northern entrance to Surigao Strait. Two of our destroyers torpedoed and drifting. *Yamashiro* sustained one torpedo hit but no impediment to battle cruising.

His three remaining ships were still pressing northwards. At 3.50 a.m. *Yamashiro* was some 28,000 yards from the American battle line, with *Mogami* and *Shigure* on her starboard quarter. At 3.51 they opened fire on ships to the northward. These were the nine destroyers of Destroyer Squadron 56 (Captain R. N. Smoot, U.S.N.) whom Oldendorf had ordered to attack at 3.35, and to "get the big ones". Their attack was delivered in three sections, each of three destroyers, in the middle of the gun duel which now developed between the main forces. At 3.50 a.m. Oldendorf ordered all ships to open fire, with the enemy 15,600 yards from the Flagship, *Louisville*. The battleships and cruisers did so at 3.53 —though *Shropshire*, with her opening salvo at 3.56, was a little late owing to radar limitations. Between 3.56 and 4.10 a.m. she fired thirty-two 8-inch broadsides of eight guns at the primary target "believed to be a battleship. It is thought that the firing was accurate and hits were obtained."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol XII, p. 218.

<sup>9</sup> In his report, Captain Nichols said of *Shropshire*'s gunnery: "A very high rate of fire was attained in rapid salvos, as many as eight broadsides in two minutes being fired. This rate exceeds anything they have ever attained before and reflects great credit on the turret crews." *Shropshire*'s turrets had been in service for 16 years, and she had fired 2,396 rounds of 8-inch shells since December 1943.

Of *Shropshire*'s firing, Midshipman Francis recorded in his diary:

*Phoenix* and *Boise*, the two cruisers nearest to us, opened fire slightly before we did at 0356. Each with fifteen 6-inch guns they pushed out an almost continuous line of tracer shells which arched up, fell, and disappeared into the ruddy glow of a Japanese battleship on fire. This was our target which had been moving at 19 knots but was now stopped. The opening range at 0356 was 15,300. When the cease fire was given we had fired 214 shells in 32 broadsides, the last range being 12,700. The analysis showed 10 straddles. In some 16 minutes that had passed like a split second, a major surface action that had been anticipated and exercised for just on a year had been fought.

The cruiser's gunnery officer, Lieut-Commander Bracegirdle,<sup>1</sup> remarked in his report that

the U.S. Ships were all using a flashless propellant, and when our first 8-inch broadside fired the flash was terrific. I consider that the Japanese ships fired several salvos in our direction, at our flash, mistaking us for a capital ship. About 4 to 6 salvos were heard to pass fairly close to us but I personally did not notice them.

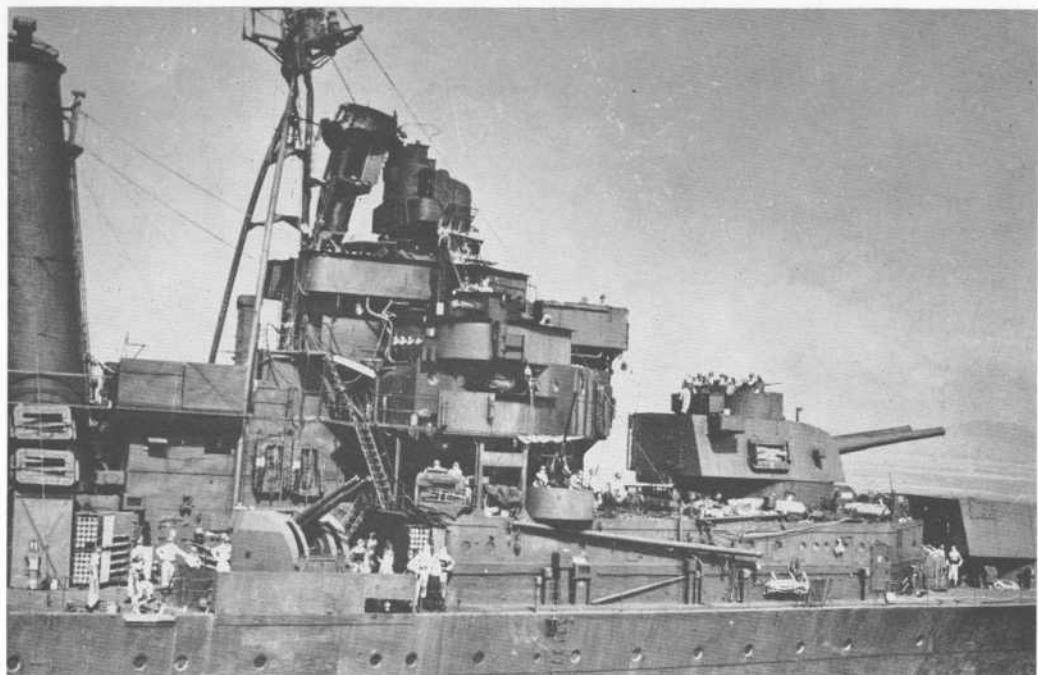
Of the rapidity of the American cruisers' 6-inch gun fire, Bracegirdle commented that "the entire effect was as if all cruisers were using long-range 40-mm Bofors. The enemy must have been simply appalled by this drenching fire which was being most accurately poured onto them." The flash of *Shropshire*'s discharges was hampering to her exposed personnel, and Bracegirdle recommended the fitting of main armament fire gongs in Torpedo Conning Position, Emergency Conning Position, Air Defence Position, and Flag Deck, "so that exposed personnel may have a chance to shut their eyes. I was caught out on three occasions and of course was completely blinded."

The volume of Allied fire was irresistible. *Yamashiro* and *Mogami* were the targets for "every size of projectile from 6-inch through 16-inch" which poured into them. They gamely returned fire, but scored no hits except on the destroyer *Albert W. Grant*<sup>2</sup> of Desron 56. *Grant* was in Smoot's own section of the squadron, last of the three sections to attack. As they were about to do so from dead ahead of the advancing Japanese, *Yamashiro*, suffering heavily from the American gunfire, slowed down and turned from a northerly to a westerly course. Smoot's destroyers turned to starboard to a parallel westerly course, and at 4.4 a.m. launched torpedoes, scoring at least one hit on the battleship. They were heavily attacked by Japanese gunfire, and Smoot ordered them to retire, which they did to the northward. As they did so, *Grant*, the rear ship, received hits from both enemy and "friendly" shells, and suffered 128 casualties, 34 of them fatal. The ship, though crippled, was saved.

Caught as he was between two fires, Smoot was impressed by the "devastating accuracy" of the gunfire of the Allied cruisers: "The arched line of tracers in the darkness looked like a continual stream of lighted

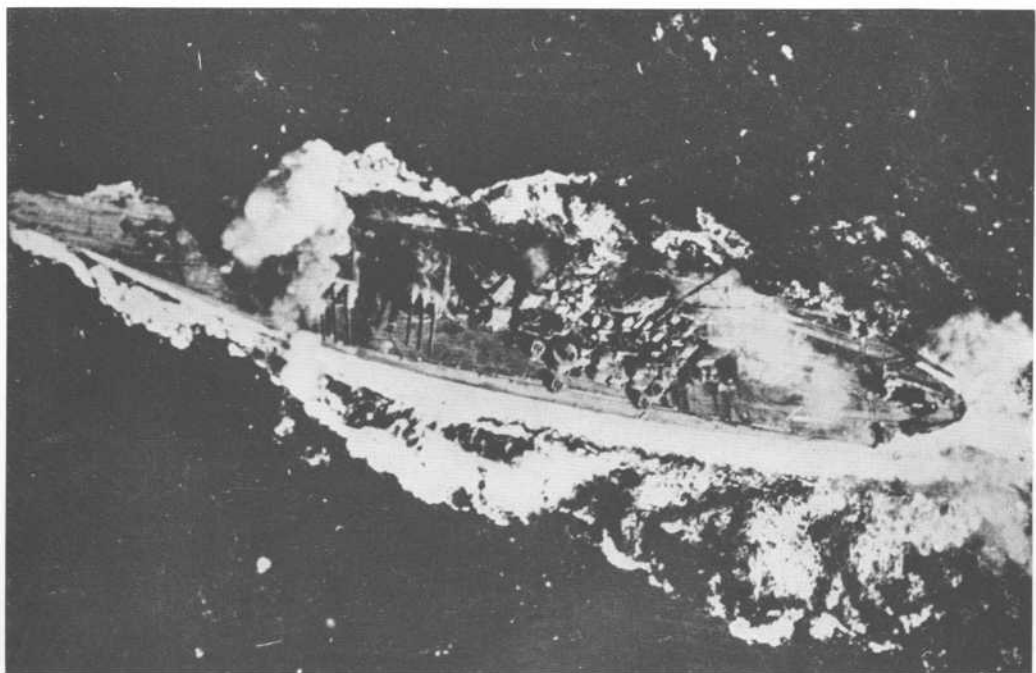
<sup>1</sup> Cdr W. S. Bracegirdle, DSC; RAN. HMAS's *Perth* 1939-41, *Shropshire* 1942-45. HMAS *Bataan* Korea 1952-53. B. Newcastle, NSW, 22 Dec 1911.

<sup>2</sup> *Albert W. Grant*, US destroyer (1943), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.



(U.S. Bureau of Aeronautics)

Damage to *Australia's* foremast, control position and bridge, 21st October 1944.



(U.S. Navy)

The Japanese battleship *Yamato* under air attack, 24th October 1944.



(U.S. Navy)

Battle of the Philippine Sea, 25th October 1944. Escort carrier *St Lo*, in foreground, and companion ships make smoke against Kurita's Japanese force.



(U.S. Navy)

Japanese shells fall among Rear-Admiral Sprague's escort carriers in the Philippine Sea battle, 25th October 1944.

railroad cars going over a hill," he recorded in his action report. And there were other Americans—distant from the scene in which Smoot occupied a central position—interested in this gunfire. "About four o'clock in the morning," Captain Tarbuck, on board *Blue Ridge* in San Pedro Bay, recorded in his Observer's Report, "the Admiral's orderly called me to the flag bridge from where could be seen 14-inch and 16-inch gun flashes to the southward." A few minutes later at 4.15 a.m., he recorded that "Admiral Kinkaid sent a radio to Admiral Halsey: 'Are fast battleships guarding San Bernardino Strait?' The answer was negative."

Actually this negative answer from Halsey was not received by Kinkaid until three hours after his question. By that time Kurita, by appearing unexpectedly off Samar with his powerful force of battleships and cruisers, had told him in unmistakable terms that San Bernardino Strait had been left unguarded.

Meanwhile, in Surigao Strait, there was a brief interlude at 4.9 a.m. when, learning of the plight of Smoot's section of Desron 56, Oldendorf ordered all ships to cease fire to give the destroyers time to retire. *Yamashiro*, steering westerly, turned another 90 degrees to port and began to retire southward at 15 knots. But at 4.19 a.m. she capsized and sank, carrying with her Nishimura and most of her crew. *Mogami*, on fire, was also retiring to the southward. A direct hit on her bridge killed all there, including her commanding officer, and other hits slowed her almost to a stop.

At this time Shima, with a depleted Second Striking Force, was just entering the battle area. He was deprived of *Abukuma*, which was torpedoed at 3.25 a.m. off Panaon Island just after he assumed battle formation. The cruiser's speed was reduced to 10 knots, and she fell behind. Shima, steering due north, proceeded at 28 knots. At 4.10 he passed the burning *Fuso* and damaged destroyers. A dense smoke screen lay ahead, and at 4.24 Shima ordered both cruisers to attack with torpedoes targets which had been detected on *Nachi*'s radar screen. This was just as they came in sight of another burning ship, *Mogami*. Shima's ships swung to starboard to launch their torpedoes, and as she turned away after delivering her attack, *Nachi* collided with the unfortunate *Mogami*. *Nachi*'s stern was badly damaged and her speed reduced to 18 knots. Shima decided to retire. He recalled his destroyers, which had been sent on to attack with torpedoes, and headed south at *Nachi*'s best speed, with *Mogami* and *Shigure* in company, and picking up *Abukuma* on the way.

The Allies had won the battle of Surigao Strait. There remained the task of accounting for such surviving enemy ships as was possible. At 4.38 Oldendorf notified the P.T. boats in the southern reaches of the Strait and its approaches that friendly cruisers and destroyers were coming south. A minute earlier he had warned *Arunta*—away to the south—"Stay out of the middle of channel. Keep near to land. You'll get sunk."<sup>3</sup> The left flank

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\* *Shropshire*'s log of signals received during the battle.

cruisers began pursuit at 4.32 a.m. Berkey's right flank force at 4.48 "changed course to 180 degrees to parallel the left flank force and support as necessary. The right flank force followed down and watched the left flank force issue the coup-de-grace to damaged enemy ships." At about 5.30 *Louisville*, *Portland* and *Denver* inflicted several more hits on *Mogami*, which was "burning like a city block", but which still lived. *Denver* and *Columbia* helped two destroyers to sink *Asagumo* at 7.21.

The rest of the remnants of the Japanese Southern Force made good their escape from Surigao Strait, but for some of them it was only a brief postponement of the end. *Mogami* was first to go, torpedoed by destroyer *Akebono* after aircraft from the American aircraft carriers had battered her to a standstill in the Mindanao Sea west of the Surigao Peninsula at 9.40 a.m. *Abukuma* was next, sunk by American Army Air Force bombers south-west of Negros at 12.42, on 27th October. And on 5th November *Nachi* was sunk in Manila Bay by TF.38 dive bombers and torpedo bombers. By then, *Shigure*, sole survivor of Nishimura's force, and *Ashigara* and the four destroyers of Shima's force, were all that still lived to tell the tale from the Japanese side of the Battle of Surigao Strait, last of the "Battle Line" actions in the history of sea warfare.

It is perhaps not inappropriate, in discussing this last example in practice of a British invention—that of Battle Line as a tactical device for naval combat<sup>4</sup>—to mention the major part played in the action by another invention in which the British were first in the field in developing operational efficiency—radar.<sup>5</sup> This was a decisive weapon for the Allies at Surigao Strait. When *West Virginia* opened fire for the Battle Line at 3.53 a.m., she did so in full radar control. She, and *Tennessee* and *California*, equipped with the newest fire control radar, were responsible for most of the Battle Line action. When Smoot, in *Newcomb*,<sup>6</sup> led the third section of Desron 56 to attack *Yamashiro*, she conducted the attack entirely by radar control, and scored a torpedo hit on the battleship. And in his report of the action, Admiral Berkey commented that "Radar again proved its great value, both in fire control and in detection and plotting of enemy vessels. . . . It was evident from the enemy's use of searchlights and starshells and from the fact that only one of our destroyers was hit that his fire control and surface search radar were not effective, either because of design or operation, or because our air strike and torpedo attacks managed to disable it. It appears improbable that the enemy would have stood on if he knew by means of his radar that so many ships were between him

<sup>4</sup> In the reign of James I, when Raleigh ordered the Royal Navy to abandon attempts to board, as the main objective, in favour of the whole fleet following the admiral, vice-admiral, or other leading ship within musket shot of the enemy. Raleigh's Orders to the Fleet of 1617, in J. S. Corbett (editor), *Fighting Instructions 1530-1816* (Navy Records Society, 1905), p. 34. Quoted by Morison, Vol XII, pp. 240-1.

<sup>5</sup> In radar (1939) "we had turned our discoveries to practical effect, and woven all into our general air defence system. In this we led the world, and it was operational efficiency rather than novelty of equipment that was the British achievement." Churchill, Vol I (1948), p. 122. "In the autumn of 1938 this all-important invention was still in its infancy at sea. I seem to remember that only two ships, the *Rodney* and the cruiser *Sheffield*, had been fitted and were trying it out with most promising results." Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 196.

<sup>6</sup> *Newcomb*, US destroyer (1943), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

and his destination, unless his orders were to do as much damage as possible prior to being sunk."

### VIII

As stated above, at 4.15 a.m. on 25th October, during "the unearthly silence that followed the check fire" in Surigao Strait, and which reigned while *Yamashiro* took her plunge to the bottom, Admiral Kinkaid, in Leyte Gulf, signalled to Admiral Halsey: "Are fast battleships guarding San Bernardino Strait?" He had reason for his question, and reason for the concern which prompted it. In the afternoon of the 24th he intercepted a signal addressed by Halsey to all Third Fleet subordinate commands, stating that a force of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers was being formed as Task Force 34. At 8.24 p.m. on the 24th, Halsey advised Kinkaid by signal that Kurita's Centre Force, then in the Sibuyan Sea off the north-west tip of Masbate Island, was making for San Bernardino Strait at 12 knots, and that he himself was "proceeding north with three groups to attack the enemy carrier force" (Ozawa), which Mitscher had reported from his aircraft sightings. From this Kinkaid assumed that Halsey was going north with his air groups, but that TF.34—the fast battleships—was left to guard San Bernardino Strait. With the whole of his surface forces engaged in battle in Surigao Strait, Kinkaid wanted to make certain that his escort carriers, and Leyte Gulf, would be protected as he had assumed in his operation plan: "Any major enemy naval force approaching from the north will be intercepted and attacked by Third Fleet covering force."<sup>7</sup>

But his assumption that TF.34 had been formed and left to watch San Bernardino Strait was wrong. Halsey's signal was a "Battle Plan", which said that TF.34 "will be formed". And it was—at 2.40 a.m. on 25th October, in accordance with Halsey's plan for the forthcoming engagement with Ozawa's force, when Third Fleet was 200 miles NE by N of San Bernardino Strait, with TF.34 in the van, steaming north at 25 knots.

There were now two enemy naval forces approaching from the north—Kurita's powerful surface force, unsighted since 11.20 p.m. on the 24th and now well out into the Philippine Sea, bound south off the coast of Samar for Leyte Gulf; and Ozawa's weak group of wing-clipped carriers off Luzon's Cape Engano. Unfortunately Halsey transposed their respective strengths, and assumed that Ozawa was the more powerful and dangerous enemy, and that Kurita was "so heavily damaged" that he could no longer be considered "a serious menace to Seventh Fleet". In consequence he took all of Third Fleet, fast battleships, cruisers, and carriers, to the north to attack Ozawa, and left wide open the door at San Bernardino Strait.

At 4.30 a.m. on the 25th, as Oldendorf's cruisers commenced the pursuit of the retiring enemy remnants in Surigao Strait, Rear-Admiral Stump, commanding the centre group of escort carriers (TU.77.4.2) off the entrance to Leyte Gulf, received a signal from CTG.77.4, Rear-Admiral

<sup>7</sup> CTF77 Op Plan 13-44, Appendix 2, Annex E. Quoted by Morison in Vol XII, p. 193.



Thomas Sprague, commanding the escort carriers, to launch daybreak searches. The other two groups were spaced 40 miles or so to the north (Rear-Admiral Clifton Sprague, TU.77.4.3) and 90 miles south (Rear-Admiral Thomas Sprague, TU.77.4.1) of him. There were 16 escort carriers in the three groups, each group with destroyer and destroyer escort screen. In this pre-dawn hour, in an atmosphere of peace and security, the three groups steamed shorewards from their night operating areas in the offing, and began flying off aircraft on routine missions.

At 6.45 a.m. lookouts in the northernmost TU.77.4.3 sighted anti-aircraft fire to the northwestward. A minute later the escort carrier *Fanshaw Bay* made an unidentified surface contact on her radar screen. And a minute later again the pilot of an anti-submarine patrol plane from Stump's *Kadashan Bay* encountered "four Japanese battleships, eight cruisers, and a number of destroyers" 20 miles north of TU.77.4.3. Eleven minutes later still, TU.77.4.3 was under fire from Kurita's ships, hull down over the northern horizon above which their masts were now visible. The wind was north-easterly, 10 knots, with intermittent squalls and rain showers.

At the time the antagonists made contact TU.77.4.3, of six escort carriers, *Fanshaw Bay* (Flag), *St Lo*, *Kalinin Bay*, *White Plains*, *Kitkun Bay* and *Gambier Bay*,<sup>8</sup> was in circular formation, diameter 5,000 yards, within a screen of three destroyers and four destroyer escorts 3,500 yards farther out. Kurita's Centre Force of battleships *Yamato*, *Nagato*, *Haruna*, *Kongo*; heavy cruisers *Chokai*, *Haguro*, *Suzuya*, *Chikuma*, *Kumano* and *Tone*; light cruisers *Noshiro* and *Yahagi*, and eleven destroyers, was changing into circular formation.

When the Japanese were reported, Clifton Sprague ordered all available aircraft to be launched to attack, after which they were to go to Tacloban airfield to re-arm and refuel. He increased to full speed (17 to 19 knots); and ordered every ship to make smoke, which lay low in the hot and humid air. At 6.55 a.m. he steered due east, a course which was near enough to the eye of the wind to permit launching, while taking him away from the approaching enemy. He broadcast an enemy report at 7.5 a.m. and asked for help.

Kurita, who was steering S.S.W. when he sighted the American ships, altered course to E.S.E. to get the weather gauge of the carriers and prevent their launching and recovering aircraft. He ordered "General Attack", with the result that no battle line was formed. "His ships, following the whims of their commanding officers, were committed piece-meal and so defeated."<sup>9</sup>

"Further course changes [by TU.77.4.3] were initiated from time to time," says the American naval historian in his description of the Battle off Samar,<sup>1</sup> "aimed to edge around the rim of a wide circle to the south-

<sup>8</sup> *Fanshaw Bay*, *Kadashan Bay*, *St Lo*, *Kalinin Bay*, *White Plains*, *Kitkun Bay*, *Gambier Bay*, US escort carriers (1943), 7,800 tons, one 5-in gun, 28 aircraft, 19 kts. *Gambier Bay* and *St Lo* sunk in Battle of Leyte Gulf, 25 Oct 1944.

<sup>9</sup> Morison, Vol XII, p. 250.

<sup>1</sup> Morison, Vol XII, pp. 250-1.

west. Sprague's purpose was to avoid encirclement by the enemy and to meet Oldendorf, whom he hoped to see coming out to help. The Battle off Samar was a running fight around the edge of a partly opened fishhook, whose curve was 20 miles in diameter."

In the event, Oldendorf did not sortie from Surigao Strait until about noon on the 25th, by which time the Battle off Samar was over, and Kurita was well on his way towards San Bernardino Strait after breaking off the action around 9.30 a.m. The news of the Japanese attack was received by Kinkaid at 7.4 a.m., when Captain Tarbuck, on board *Blue Ridge* in Leyte Gulf, recorded that TU.77.4.3 reported that a group of cruisers had appeared on their port quarter and had them under fire.

It now becomes apparent that an extremely critical situation exists. The enemy's *Second Diversion Attack Force* has sortied into the Pacific Ocean through San Bernardino Strait under cover of darkness to attack our escort carriers, convoys, and Leyte Gulf shipping. . . . The enemy battle line, only two or three hours steaming distance from this anchorage, can outrun and outshoot anything in this area, their minimum ship speed is 25 knots and their two newest battleships are suspected of carrying 18" guns.

At 7.39 Kinkaid sent Halsey the fourth of a series of messages (the first telling of Kurita's attack was sent at 7.7 a.m.): "Fast battleships are urgently needed at Leyte Gulf." Four minutes earlier *Shropshire*, then with the forces chasing the remnants of retiring Japanese south through Surigao Strait, received the news of the attack on TU.77.4.3:

It was evident that this force had passed through San Bernardino Strait during the night and were attempting an assault on Leyte Gulf from the eastward. Our force therefore broke off the action in progress and proceeded at high speed to the northward to defend the eastern entrance of Surigao Strait. At 10.15, in accordance with orders received from CTF.77, a striking force consisting of *Tennessee*, *Pennsylvania*, *California*, *Louisville*, *Portland*, *Minneapolis*, *Shropshire*, and 13 U.S. destroyers was formed under the command of Rear-Admiral Oldendorf in *Louisville*. This force sortied at about 1200 to attack the enemy but at 1345 orders were received to patrol to the eastward of the entrance.<sup>2</sup>

It was within a few minutes of the sighting by TU.77.4.3 of Kurita's masts over the northern horizon that—at 7.10 a.m., 250 miles to the northward—a combat air patrol launched from the Third Fleet carriers sighted Ozawa's Northern Force. Within three-quarters of an hour the aircraft of Mitscher's first strike were over the Japanese, and it was about then that the first of the urgent calls for help reached Halsey from the area whence Ozawa had seduced him. His response, at 8.48 a.m., was to order McCain's carrier force, TG.38.1, comprising five carriers, *Wasp*, *Hornet*, *Hancock*,<sup>3</sup> *Cowpens* and *Monterey*,<sup>4</sup> then fuelling in position about 357 miles E.N.E. of San Bernardino Strait, "to proceed at best possible speed"

<sup>2</sup> But by 1200 it was two-and-a-half hours since Kurita had broken off action in the Battle off Samar at 9.25. And it is doubtful what help Oldendorf could have given even if he had moved to do so as soon as he heard at 7.35 of Kurita's attack. For he was then 65 miles—three hours steaming—from where Kurita turned away at 9.25.

<sup>3</sup> *Hornet*, *Hancock*, US aircraft carriers (1943-44), 27,100 tons, twelve 5-in guns, 103 aircraft, 33 kts.

<sup>4</sup> *Cowpens*, *Monterey*, US light aircraft carriers (1943), 11,000 tons, eighteen 40-mm guns, 33 aircraft, 32 kts.

to strike Kurita. This was approximately the time of Mitscher's preliminary report, at 8.50 a.m., of the first air strike on Ozawa, which resulted in the sinking of light carrier *Chitose* and the destroyer *Akitsuki*, and the crippling of *Zuikaku*. The time coincided, too, with that of the first loss suffered by the antagonists off Samar, where Clifton Sprague's TU.77.4.3 was putting up a gallant and effective fight with the five-inch guns of the carriers, and with destroyer and air attacks against his powerful adversary, ably supported by the aircraft of Stump's TU.77.4.2 and Thomas Sprague's TU.77.4.1 to the south of him. The Japanese heavy cruiser *Kumano* had her bow blown off by a torpedo from destroyer *Johnston* at 7.27 a.m., and *Chikuma*, victim of both destroyers and aircraft, sank at 8.53 a.m., two minutes before the American destroyer *Hoel*<sup>5</sup> went down after suffering 40 hits by 5-inch, 8-inch and 14-inch shells.

In all, in these three battles of 25th October, from the time of the sinking of Japanese destroyer *Yamagumo* at 3.20 a.m. in Surigao Strait, until that of Japanese aircraft carrier *Chiyoda* at 4.30 p.m. off Cape Engano, nineteen ships were sunk,<sup>6</sup> fourteen of them Japanese, that number being made up of six ships in Nishimura's Southern Force, five in Ozawa's Northern Force, and three in Kurita's Centre Force. All five of the American ships were in Clifton Sprague's TU.77.4.3. These figures would have been different but for the actions of Halsey on the one side and of Kurita on the other. Through his wrong conclusion that Kurita was a spent force, and his consequent decision to take his battleships north to help to deal with Ozawa, Halsey lost the opportunity to destroy Centre Force as it emerged from San Bernardino Strait. With his tardy detachment at 10.55 p.m. of TF.34 to return to the aid of the escort carriers as the result of repeated calls for help—and a signal from Nimitz at Pearl Harbour—he was too late to intercept Kurita before Centre Force retired through San Bernardino Strait between 10 p.m. and midnight on the 25th, and also lost the opportunity to obliterate Ozawa's Northern Force. He thus fell between two stools.

Kurita, for his part, fell a victim to the inadequacies of Japanese Intelligence, and his own consequent indecisions. When he sighted Clifton Sprague's escort carriers in the early morning of the 25th, he had had no intelligence since the previous day of the position of the Third Fleet carriers, which he had then learned were east of Luzon. Identification at a distance, especially when hampered by smoke and passing rain squalls, is never easy, and Kurita thought the carriers sighted might be those of TF.38. His Chief of Staff's estimate of the sightings was "one or two battleships, four or five fleet carriers, and 'at least' ten heavy cruisers".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Johnston*, *Hoel*, US destroyers (1943), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. Sunk in Battle of Leyte Gulf, 25 Oct 1944.

<sup>6</sup> Japanese naval losses were: two battleships, *Fuso* and *Yamashiro*; one carrier, *Zuikaku* and three light carriers, *Zuiho*, *Chitose* and *Chiyoda*; four heavy cruisers, *Chikuma*, *Chokai*, *Suzuya* and *Mogami*; four destroyers, *Akitsuki*, *Yamagumo*, *Michishio* and *Asagumo*. American losses were two escort carriers, *Gambier Bay* and *St Lo*; and destroyers *Hoel*, *Samuel B. Roberts* and *Johnston*.

<sup>7</sup> Morison, Vol XII, p. 248.

He was thus uneasy. He had suffered severely through air attack in the last two days, and with no air cover and only a few float planes on his battleships, was chary of the carriers. His "General Attack" order resulted in his force becoming strung out and split up into separated groups, and the tenacious and resolute attacks of Clifton Sprague's destroyers, and the air attacks by aircraft from all three of the escort carrier groups and from land-based aircraft, caused disconcertingly heavy damage. As stated above, the action off Samar "was a running fight around the edge of a partly opened fishhook, whose curve was 20 miles in diameter". Clifton Sprague's aim was to avoid encirclement, and to make as much southing as possible to get within such shelter as Oldendorf could afford. With smoke, with destroyer attacks which forced evasive action and consequent confusion on the Japanese, and with air attacks which inflicted damage and losses, he strove to harass and obstruct the powerful adversary dogging him and attacking him with gunfire from either quarter. First blood came to the Americans with the sinking of heavy cruiser *Chikuma* at 8.53. Within the next quarter hour Sprague's force lost destroyer *Hoel* and carrier *Gambier Bay*. It was shortly after this last-named sank, at 9.7 a.m., that the Japanese delivered a destroyer torpedo attack which was thwarted by the American destroyer *Johnston*. She was sunk by the concentrated gunfire of the Japanese squadron she engaged on her own, but it was the deciding incident for Kurita, who had been so impeded by Clifton Sprague's destroyer attacks that he lost tactical control of his force and had to break off, turn north, and regroup. At 9.11 he issued the order to break off action: "Rendezvous, my course north, speed 20." He left two more heavy cruisers crippled, and both sank, *Chokai* at 9.30 a.m., and *Suzuya* at 1.22 p.m. For three hours after breaking off action he manoeuvred around in and to the north of the battle area, and at 1.10 p.m. was only a few miles on the Samar side of where the battle had begun. He then definitely withdrew toward San Bernardino Strait.

Meanwhile Clifton Sprague's force had suffered more losses. Destroyer *Samuel B. Roberts*<sup>8</sup> had sunk at 10.5 a.m., and at 11.25 a.m. the carrier *St Lo*, blazing from stem to stern, foundered under a cloud of dense smoke, victim of a *Kamikaze* attack by land-based Japanese aircraft, in which *Kalinin Bay* received a crash dive on her flight deck which damaged it badly and started fires, and *White Plains* and *Kitkun Bay* were near-missed. Earlier, the first *Kamikaze* attacks were delivered on TU.77.4.1 when, at 7.40 a.m., Thomas Sprague's force was surprised by six Japanese aircraft from Davao. The escort carrier *Santee* was crash-dived by an aircraft which smashed through the flight deck and caused fires and 43 casualties, 16 fatal. *Suwannee* was also a victim of a *Kamikaze* attack which did considerable damage, but no more ships were lost in this action.

Up north, where Halsey and his battleships and carriers were hastening to engage Ozawa's force by gunfire in addition to the air strikes already

<sup>8</sup> *Samuel B. Roberts*, US destroyer escort (1944), 1,350 tons, two 5-in guns, three 21-in torpedo tubes, 24 kts. Sunk in Battle of Leyte Gulf, 25 Oct 1944.

in progress, the Japanese suffered more losses. In the second strike, at 9.45 a.m., *Chiyoda* was crippled and set on fire. She was sunk by American cruisers about 5 p.m. Halsey was suffering his own bombardments at this time, in the form of requests for help from Kinkaid and Clifton Sprague. These signals were heard by others, and Tarbuck, in *Blue Ridge*, recorded that

radio dispatches from our beleaguered forces are pathetic and unbelievable. . . . People here feel that the Third Fleet battleships are chasing a secondary force, leaving us at the mercy of the enemy's main body. If our analysis is faulty it is because we are the ones who are trapped in Leyte Gulf. As soon as the Jap finishes off our defenceless CVEs, we're next, and I mean today.

Away in Pearl Harbour, the Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet, Nimitz, heard the calls for help and was evidently concerned. His question to Halsey, at 10 a.m.: "Where is TF.34?", added to the earlier appeals, caused Halsey, at 10.55 a.m. to send the battleships south, together with the three carriers of TG.38.2. But by then the Battle off Samar was over, and he was too late to intercept Kurita. The Japanese admiral broke off the action off Samar in time to save a "fleet in being", which, though incapable of offensive action, was a cause of worry to Seventh Fleet planning and operations officers in the months ahead. And, as Kurita escaped extinction in the south, so did Ozawa in the north. He suffered the loss of four carriers—*Zuikaku*, badly hit again in the American third air strike, sank at 2.14 p.m., and *Zuiho*, victim of the fourth strike, sank at 3.26. And, during the evening he lost destroyer *Hatsutsuki* to cruiser gunfire and light cruiser *Tama*<sup>9</sup> to a submarine's torpedo. But the two converted battleships, *Hyuga* and *Ise*, light cruisers *Oyodo* and *Isuzu*, and seven destroyers survived 25th October, the day which destroyed the Imperial Japanese Navy as an offensive force, and cost the American Navy more than 2,000 casualties, including 1,169 killed and missing. No battle casualties for the Japanese Navy in the Leyte operations were ever compiled.

## IX

The Battle for Leyte Gulf decided the fate of the Philippines, but the Leyte campaign did not end on 25th October 1944. The Japanese held Ormoc, on the west side of the island, and they had landed 45,000 troops there, more than double the number on Leyte when the Americans landed. From the American viewpoint the tactical situation at Leyte was serious at 1st November. The Japanese had regained strength in the air, and with bombing and *Kamikaze* attacks they made the situation in Leyte Gulf hazardous. Support had to come from TF.38, and as a result, air strikes which had been planned on the Japanese Home Islands before the end of the year had to be postponed. *Shropshire* and *Arunta* tasted something of the conditions in Leyte Gulf, as did also *Gascoyne*, busy there on hydrographic work. The Australian cruiser and destroyer formed part of

<sup>9</sup> *Tama*, Japanese light cruiser (1920), 5,700 tons, seven 5.5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts. Sunk in Battle of Leyte Gulf, 25 Oct 1944.

TG.77.1, which evolved from a reorganisation of Seventh Fleet on 29th October. All ships which could be spared went to Ulithi for refreshment. Admiral Weyler remained as S.O.P.A. Leyte Gulf, in command of TG.77.1, comprising the battleships *Mississippi*, *California*, *Pennsylvania*; cruisers *Shropshire*, *Phoenix*, *Nashville* and *Boise*; and 13 destroyers, including *Arunta*.

The Task Group had the task of protecting the Gulf, and patrolled the entrance nightly. Its ships were often under air and *Kamikaze* attack. In a particularly heated period on 1st November one *Kamikaze*, driven off from *Shropshire* by her anti-aircraft fire, attempted to crash-dive the destroyer *Claxton*<sup>1</sup> and, though it near missed, damaged her severely. The same day a *Kamikaze* crashed the destroyer *Abner Read*, and a few minutes later the destroyer rolled over and sank. The American destroyer, in her death throes, caused *Shropshire* to take emergency action to avoid being torpedoed. *Abner Read*'s torpedoes were trained in the cruiser's direction, and by some means or other were fired. The torpedo tracks were seen early, and an emergency turn of 90 degrees to port enabled *Shropshire* to avoid them. "H.M.A.S. *Arunta*," recorded Buchanan in his "Report of Proceedings" for November, "contributed her share to the heavy concentration of fire that destroyed an enemy aircraft soon after *Abner Read* was hit. . . . For the remainder of our stay in Leyte Gulf no day passed without several Bogies and Bandits and the consequent air alerts."

And in *Gascoyne*, Commander Read, in his "Proceedings for the Month of October", remarked that

since arrival in Leyte Gulf, 39 Japanese air raids have taken place in the vicinity of this ship. During these raids four ships have been seen to be hit, in each case by a disabled aircraft, and 30 aircraft have been shot down in sight. Of the bombs dropped, four were within 200 yards of this ship. The only damage received was the whaler's falls stranded and one man injured in the leg from other ships' shells bursting overhead.

There were some more R.A.N. ships at Leyte in November. On the 4th the Survey Group was added to with the arrival of H.M.A.S. *Benalla* (Lieut-Commander Gale<sup>2</sup>) from Hollandia; and on the 12th *Warramunga* arrived and joined TG.77.1. She had on board eagerly awaited mail for ships of the force, and on receiving permission to distribute it "the following signal was made to *Shropshire*: 'Intend to visit you first.' The prompt and understandable reply to this was: 'Shall open fire if you don't.'"

Until 16th November, when Rear-Admiral Weyler was relieved by Rear-Admiral T. D. Ruddock, U.S.N., as commander of Allied Naval Forces operating in defence of the Leyte Gulf, *Shropshire* and *Arunta* remained there with TG.77.1. That afternoon, in company with *Mississippi*, *Phoenix*, *Boise*, *Nashville* and four American destroyers, they left for Manus, where they arrived on the 21st. *Warramunga* remained at Leyte until the 25th,

<sup>1</sup> *Claxton*, US destroyer (1919), 1,060 tons, four 4-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

<sup>2</sup> Cdr D'A. T. Gale, DSC; RAN. HMAS's *Adelaide*, *Moresby*, *Bungaree*; comd HMAS's *Benalla* 1944-45 and *Moresby* 1945-46. B. Orange, NSW, 27 Jul 1911.

when she sailed with U.S. Ships *Pennsylvania* and *H. L. Edwards* (7,176 tons) and reached Manus on the 29th.

There the Australian ships comprising Task Group 74.1 remained until 26th December—with occasional hours at sea for exercises—when they left for Kossol Roads, on the first stage of their next important mission in the Philippines, the invasion of Luzon. When the Task Group sailed from Manus it was restored to its original strength, for on 4th December *Australia*, the damage she suffered at Leyte made good, arrived at Manus from Espiritu Santo. And the force was again under the command of a graduate of the Royal Australian Naval College. At Manus on 9th December, Commodore Farncomb, who had been recalled from service with the Royal Navy when Commodore Collins was injured in the Trafalgar Day attack, hoisted his pendant as Commodore Commanding the Australian Squadron and Commander Task Group 74.1.

The Australian ships received complimentary signals from General MacArthur, and Admirals Kinkaid, Oldendorf, Berkey and Weyler, for their work in the Leyte campaign, with particular reference to *Shropshire's* efficiency in radar reporting. The American destroyer *Ammen* referred in a signal to

the superb Radar telling performed so steadily and reliably by the *Shropshire* during the operations against the enemy just completed. The information supplied by Porthole [*Shropshire's* communications designation] was of inestimable value in maintaining the *Ammen* alert and ready to deal properly with the Nips at all times.

And, in a letter to Captain Nichols, Admiral Weyler remarked that:

Commander Task Group 77.1 concurs that *Shropshire's* performance in radar telling was outstanding and takes this opportunity to congratulate her Commanding Officer and all officers and men who contributed thereto. As a matter of fact *Shropshire's* excellent performance in subject matter has heretofore been attested to in reports submitted to Superior Command.

Of the conditions during the campaign, Captain Nichols wrote in his report:

The period of the current operations has been a trying one for the ships' companies. During the week commencing dawn 20th October *Shropshire's* ship's company were at their action stations for 146 hours out of the total of 168. During the following week they spent a total of 98 hours at their action stations. The overall percentage of time spent at action stations to total time over these two weeks was 72.6 per cent. I have little doubt that *Arunta's* ship's company has put in very similar hours.

Buchanan had his own remarks to make about *Arunta*. In his "Report of Proceedings" for October he commented:

The end of this month marks the end of 12 months since *Arunta* sailed from Brisbane for Milne Bay. The ship has visited Sydney twice—once for 21 and once for 17 days—a total of 38 days. The remainder of the time has been spent in the tropical waters of New Guinea, and now, of the Philippines. Owing to the danger of tropical diseases ashore, the complete lack of facilities, and the ship usually being at short notice, officers and men have remained on board throughout this

period. That is they have been shut up in a crowded steel box in conditions of tropical heat for almost a year. I emphasise these conditions because they represent, I believe, a fine instance of the uncomplaining staying power of both officers and men.

The supply of fresh vegetables was a problem, and Nichols, as Senior Officer Commanding Australian Squadron, made representations to the Naval Board regarding this. It was—he remarked in his report—hoped that ample fresh vegetables would be available on the return to Manus (after the Leyte operation) “after our long period without them, but only sufficient for three meals in each ship were received”. And on 10th December he sent a signal to the relevant authorities—repeated to the Naval Board—“Request information when supplies of fresh vegetables may be expected, observing that last issue in *Shropshire* was made on 18 October. *Arunta* has reported one case of scurvy which is considered due to lack of fresh vegetables and has now sailed for forward areas with no fresh vegetables.”

There were, however, oases in the culinary desert, and these flowered on Christmas Day. This was, by the exigencies of the times, a moveable feast in the Australian ships. *Shropshire*, for instance, observed it on 17th December, and Midshipman Francis recorded that “with an excellent meal of roast turkey and plum pudding most enjoyed a very excellent day”. That was in Seadler Harbour, where *Warramunga* also celebrated Christmas, but on 21st December. *Shropshire*’s chaplain conducted a choral service on the destroyer’s forecastle, followed by a Communion Service. Before dinner, Alliston and his officers went the rounds on the mess-decks “which, in accordance with tradition, were excellently decorated. The prevailing motif was palm fronds and beer bottles.” The Victualling Stores Issuing Ship *Merkur* had arrived, and Alliston recorded that the standard of the Christmas fare she brought “was excellent. The turkeys in particular were of first class quality.<sup>3</sup> . . . Altogether, Christmas Day 1944, was an outstanding day for all hands, the fact that it was so I consider to be a great tribute to the ship’s company spirit and morale—much was made out of very little.”

By way of contrast, *Gascoyne*, celebrating her Christmas on 25th December in Guiuan Harbour, south-east Samar, had a busy, if fruitful time. Throughout the first half of November she was at Leyte Gulf on survey work. But on the 17th she sailed for Manus for stores and recreation, and remained there until 16th December, when she left for Leyte, reached on the 21st. While at Manus, Read relinquished command of *Gascoyne* on proceeding to Sydney to join H.M.A.S. *Whyalla*, and Hunt assumed command temporarily until Lieutenant Peel<sup>4</sup> arrived on 4th December. When *Gascoyne* returned to Leyte the San Pedro survey had just been completed, and Hunt was charged with the survey of Guiuan Harbour,

<sup>3</sup> *Warramunga*’s Christmas menu was: Breakfast—Fresh fruit, tea and coffee, cereal, fried eggs and bacon; Dinner—Roast turkey and ham, beans and peas, plum pudding and brandy sauce, fruit trifle and jelly, nuts and beer; Tea—Christmas cake, nuts, iced fruit juice; Supper—Giblet soup, cold roast pork and ham, potato salad and mayonnaise, iced fruit juice.

<sup>4</sup> Capt E. J. Peel, DSC; RAN. HMAS’s *Canberra*, *Vendetta*, *Vampire*, *Australia*; comd HMAS’s *Kalgoorlie* 1944, *Gascoyne* 1944-46. B. Folkestone, England, 30 Nov 1916.



where it was proposed to establish an American naval repair base. The ship arrived at Guiuan from Leyte Gulf on 24th December, and anchored at 4 p.m. off shore "in the vicinity of five liberties [Liberty ships], the Dutch transport *Sommelsdijk* (7,900 tons), and several lesser craft".

Next day Christmas dinner was celebrated in *Gascoyne* at midday, and at 7.46 p.m.:

Nippon's Christmas present was received when *Sommelsdijk* was torpedoed by aerial torpedo in number one lower hold port, immediately catching fire, the cargo being general stores, and logistic supplies for the 1,300 C.B. Naval Troops carried on board. This ship was anchored about 1½ miles to the north-west of us, several reefs intervening. The visibility was poor, no moon and occasional heavy rain squalls and it was not until 8.35 p.m. when a signal was received from the Dutchman that it was appreciated that anything untoward had happened, the torpedoing occurring on the side away from us.<sup>5</sup>

From then on events moved rapidly. *Gascoyne*, which was at four hours' notice for steam, "immediately carried out a crash light up, steam being on main engines 12 minutes from orders being received, with second boiler connected from cold 20 minutes from orders". By 9.5 p.m. *Gascoyne* had secured alongside *Sommelsdijk*—which was well ablaze forward in both numbers one and two lower holds—and the frigate's Engineer Officer, Engineer-Lieutenant Corrighan,<sup>6</sup> boarded the Dutchman with his damage control parties and took charge of the fire fighting operations. About 10.30 p.m., when it appeared that there was danger of losing *Sommelsdijk*, *Gascoyne* disembarked that ship's 1,300 troops, some of whom were transferred to the American *Buttonwood* (935 tons); but *Gascoyne*, "for the space of approximately one hour, had some 1,000 men between decks, including approximately 70 walking casualties". By about 2 a.m. Corrighan was able to report that danger of the fire spreading further was over; and by 6 a.m. all fires were out. Peel, in his report, said:

It is a matter of pride to record that all fire fighting in *Sommelsdijk* was carried out by the Engineroom Department of *Gascoyne*, supervised by our Engineer Officer. It should be noted that on relief from Boiler-room and Engine-room Watchkeeping duties, ratings immediately joined the fire parties to replace their reliefs, this over a period of nine hours alongside.

*HDML1074* was also present—and helpful—on this occasion; and on 30th December the Guiuan survey "as it stood in its infancy" was handed over to her commanding officer, Lieut-Commander Robertson. At daylight next morning *Gascoyne* sailed for San Pedro Bay, Leyte Gulf, to prepare for the next operation at Luzon.

Reference has been made above to the Japanese holding Ormoc on the west side of Leyte. By the beginning of December the Americans had cleared the enemy from most of the eastern half of the island, and on 30th November it was decided to postpone a proposed landing on Mindoro

<sup>5</sup> Hunt's (CTG.70.5 Afloat in HMAS *Gascoyne*) Letter of Proceedings for December 1944.

<sup>6</sup> Engr Lt-Cdr M. Corrighan, MBE, DSC; RANR. HMAS's *Ballarat* and *Gascoyne*. Of Sydney; b. Mosman, NSW, 26 Sep 1902.

Island—projected for 5th December—and, instead, to land the American 77th Division, less one regimental combat team, in Ormoc Bay, between three and four miles south-east of Ormoc, on 7th December. The Ormoc assault convoy, in which there was no combatant ship larger than a destroyer nor troop carrier larger than a destroyer transport, left Dulag, Leyte Gulf, at 1.30 p.m. on 6th December. Just after 7 a.m. on the 7th—the way having been prepared by a destroyers' bombardment—the first wave of landing craft reached the beach at the objective. By 9.30 a.m. two full regimental combat teams were ashore.

The American landing coincided with a Japanese reinforcement which, in the enemy's eighth "Tokyo Express" run since the American invasion, landed 4,000 troops. The Japanese convoy was attacked by Marine aircraft from Tacloban as it entered San Isidro Bay, some 18 miles north of Ormoc, and five ships were sunk. The American turn came an hour later when a heavy and determined Japanese air attack by torpedo and *Kamikaze* aircraft caused the loss of destroyers *Mahan* and *Ward*,<sup>7</sup> and severely damaged *Liddle*<sup>8</sup> and *Lamson*. But the landing was successful, and General Krueger, Commanding General at Leyte, later commented: "The landing of the 77th Division near Ormoc, serving to split the enemy forces and to separate them from their supply base, proved to be the decisive action of the Leyte operation."<sup>9</sup>

The Mindoro landing, postponed from 5th December, was carried out on the 15th. The Visayan Attack Force, as it was designated, was under the command of Rear-Admiral Struble in *Nashville*, with eight destroyer transports and a number of landing craft, minesweepers, and other small vessels, with twelve escorting destroyers. There was a group of 23 P.T's. And a Heavy Covering and Carrier Group of battleships, cruisers, escort carriers and destroyers, under Rear-Admiral Ruddock, operated in the Sulu Sea in support. Among the auxiliary vessels employed in this operation were two Australian ships—the tug *Reserve* and the oiler *Bishopdale*.

There were not more than 500 Japanese troops on Mindoro, but the enemy, who had early Intelligence of the passage of the assault convoy, had powerful defences in the shape of air strikes from airfields in Luzon and the Visayas. The first air attack, just before 3 p.m. on 13th December, as Struble's convoy was about to round the southern cape of Negros into the Sulu Sea, was by *Kamikaze* bombers. One of them crash-dived *Nashville*, inflicted heavy damage which put the cruiser out of the fight, and killed or mortally wounded 133 officers and men. In later attacks that day the destroyer *Haraden* in Ruddock's force was crash-dived, and suffered heavy damage. She was sent back to Leyte with 14 dead and 24 wounded. In attacks on 14th December the Japanese were largely ineffectual, though they did damage *Bishopdale*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ward*, US destroyer transport (1918—conv. to APD), 1,060 tons, six 3-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. Sunk off Leyte, 7 Dec 1944.

<sup>8</sup> *Liddle*, US fast transport (1943), 1,400 tons, three 3-in or two 5-in guns, three 21-in torpedo tubes, 23 kts.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Morison, Vol XII, p. 385.

That night the assault force reached its destination, at the south-west corner of Mindoro, where the primary objective was the establishment of a perimeter embracing the village of San Jose, and to begin airstrip construction. Landing began at 7.30 a.m. after a brief bombardment by destroyers. There was no opposition on shore. The invaders were, however, subjected to air attacks which, over the days, did a fair amount of damage to the ships of the landing force and of reinforcement convoys; and in the night 26th-27th December a Japanese surface force comprising heavy cruiser *Ashigara*, light cruiser *Oyodo*, and six destroyers, carried out a bombardment of San Jose village and airfield, and the American landing beach. The Japanese force did not go scathless, since it lost destroyer *Kiyoshima* to a P.T. boat's torpedo.

On 2nd January 1945, the Americans occupied the adjacent island of Marinduque, commanding the eastern approach to Verde Island Passage between Mindoro and Luzon. By 30th January there was no enemy force capable of organised action on Mindoro, and three American air strips were completed on the island. Mindoro was to help the forthcoming Lingayen Gulf landings with air support from these strips, and to prove a useful staging and assembly point for future operations.

Organised Japanese resistance ceased on 20th December on Leyte, but mopping up continued for nearly five months. By 2nd January 1945 a total of 60,809 unburied enemy dead had been counted, and 434 prisoners taken; by 8th May a further 25,000 had been killed or captured.

## CHAPTER 18

### OPERATION RIMAU

WHILE the Task Force was engaged in the decisive operations at Leyte in October 1944, frigates, corvettes, and motor launches of the R.A.N. were carrying out their less prominent but important duties on the lines of communication. Three frigates, twenty corvettes, and a number of M.L.'s were escorting, patrolling, and carrying out other operations in waters north of New Guinea, some with occasional bombardment missions.<sup>1</sup> About this time three of them—one corvette and two M.L.'s—were to be the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth ships of the R.A.N. sunk during the war, excluding small craft of which, until then, six had been victims of marine disaster and two of enemy action. Mention has been made earlier of the loss of one of the M.L.'s, *ML827*, lost on 20th November after running ashore near Jacquinot Bay, New Britain. Actually she was the last of the three to go.

First to be lost was *ML430* (Lieutenant Wordsworth<sup>2</sup>), sunk off north Biak on 14th August 1944. She was in company with *ML819* (Lieutenant Moore<sup>3</sup>) on patrol when she was hit by gunfire during an attack on what was believed to be an enemy submarine.

On the night of 13th August *ML819* proceeded to a patrol area off Warsa, north Biak. Lights were seen, flashing at regular intervals, about one mile east of Tanjong Obubari. At 10.10 p.m. lights were seen flashing on the water's edge in the approximate position of Warsa. Soon afterwards a vessel, presumed to be enemy, was sighted, and identified as a submarine. Moore made an enemy report, which apparently was never received. At 10.50 p.m. *ML819* contacted *ML430*, and asked her to join in support. At this time visibility closed down. There was no sign of *ML430*, and Moore launched an attack on the submarine.

*ML430* reported being hit by gunfire in the magazine, and burning. A search of the area for the submarine yielded no result, and Moore closed *ML430* and embarked her ship's company. After another fruitless search of the area for the submarine, *ML819* closed the burning *ML430* and endeavoured to sink her by gunfire. While so engaged a vessel, presumed to be the submarine, was sighted proceeding at high speed. Moore tried to get it in silhouette against the glow from the burning *ML430*, but the stranger disappeared and was not again sighted. *ML819* thereupon proceeded to Mios Wundi, and there landed the ship's company of *ML430*.

Second on the list of R.A.N. casualties at this period was the corvette

<sup>1</sup> Frigates: *Barcoo*, *Burdekin*, *Hawkesbury*. Corvettes: *Ararat*, *Bendigo*, *Broome*, *Colac*, *Cootamundra*, *Cowra*, *Deloraine*, *Geelong*, *Gladstone*, *Glenelg*, *Goulburn*, *Gympie*, *Katoomba*, *Kiama*, *Latrobe*, *Lithgow*, *Rockhampton*, *Strahan*, *Townsville*, *Wagga*.

<sup>2</sup> Lt A. A. Wordsworth, RANVR. *ML1074*; comd *ML430* 1943-44, *ML817* 1945. B. Gordonvale, Qld, 27 Dec 1911.

<sup>3</sup> Lt R. A. E. Moore, RANVR. Comd *ML813* 1943, *ML819* 1943-44. Executive; of Sydney; b. Mosman, NSW, 10 Jan 1910.

*Geelong*. At 8.37 p.m. on 18th October the N.O.I.C. Langemak (Lieut-Commander Phelan<sup>4</sup>) received a signal from the master of the American tanker *York*: "Collision at 1007Z position Lat 06 04 South 147 50 East HMAS *Geelong* badly damaged. Standing by." Phelan immediately dispatched *PC1121* from Langemak—she left at 9.11 p.m.—and diverted a near-by merchant ship, *Julian Early*, to the scene of the collision, about 30 miles north of Langemak, to help if required. At 9.47 p.m. N.O.I.C. New Guinea (Captain Esdaile) told Phelan by signal that H.M.A.S. *Ararat* (Lieutenant Muzzell<sup>5</sup>) was available at Madang if required, and at 11.45 told him that *Ararat* was sailing at midnight to give assistance. Just after midnight the U.S. Army tug *TP110* was dispatched from Finschhafen. A few minutes later a signal was received from *PC1121* reporting that *Geelong* had foundered. All hands were saved and were on board *York*.

Launched at Williamstown on 22nd April 1941, *Geelong* commissioned on 16th January 1942 under the command of Lieutenant C. G. Hill. From then until April 1944 she was employed on escort duty and general routine work mainly on the east coast of Australia, with a brief interlude in Noumea in March-April 1942. In April 1944 Lieutenant Mathers<sup>6</sup> succeeded Hill in command, and the ship was placed under the operational control of N.O.I.C. New Guinea at Milne Bay, for duty in New Guinea waters. In the evening of 18th October she was northward bound from Milne Bay for Madang and Hollandia, with her complement of 86 officers and ratings, and with four officers and 12 ratings on passage to Madang—a total of 102. At the time of the collision the weather was good, sea smooth, visibility four to five miles, with gentle S by E wind. *Geelong* was steering NW½N against a two-and-a-half knot S by E set. She was burning no lights.

*York*, owned by the United States War Shipping Administration, a tanker of 10,448 tons, sailed from Humboldt Bay at midnight on 16th October, bound for Balboa. Immediately before the collision she was steering SE by E, burning dimmed masthead and side lights.

At 7.55 p.m. *York*'s master, Captain H. Birkland, went on to the bridge in readiness to change course. He instructed the Third Mate, who was officer of the watch, to make the necessary change to SE by S at 8.7 p.m. "About 8.6 p.m. I thought I saw something about a point and a half on the starboard bow. I picked up the glasses to verify same and immediately gave orders: hard right helm and full astern and gave one short blast on the whistle. Immediately following my orders came the report from the bow lookout black object on the starboard bow."<sup>7</sup>

The lights of *York* were seen from *Geelong* and, at 8.6 p.m. the tanker's one blast on the whistle ("I am directing my course to starboard") was

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Cdr B. K. Phelan, RAN(EL). HMAS's *Hobart*, *Platypus*, *Adelaide*; NOIC and Port Director, Langemak, 1944-45. B. St Helens, Tas, 16 Sep 1908.

<sup>5</sup> Lt-Cdr N. M. Muzzell, RANR. Comd HMAS's *Gunbar* 1940-42, *Ararat* 1943-45. Merchant navy officer; b. London, 6 Jun 1904.

<sup>6</sup> Lt M. E. Mathers, RANR. HMAS's *Canberra* and *Rockhampton*; comd HMAS *Geelong* 1944. B. Hobart, 24 Sep 1909.

<sup>7</sup> Captain's log, s.s. *York*.

heard. *Geelong* increased to full speed, turned hard to starboard until the ship commenced swinging, and then turned hard to port. But the ships were in too close proximity for collision to be avoided, and at 8.6½ p.m.—only half a minute after Captain Birkland first sighted *Geelong*—she and *York* collided. In the words of Captain Birkland's log:

We struck the H.M.A.S. *Geelong* on the port quarter. [The corvette's stern was severed abaft the minesweeping hatch.] They signalled they were listing badly and sinking, and asked for immediate assistance. I launched two lifeboats and they proceeded towards the *Geelong* and picked up two boatloads each of survivors. We were standing by about a quarter of a mile away. We succeeded to get the whole crew on board our vessel. At 9.51 p.m. the *Geelong* sank. We checked the whole crew and passengers, total 102 persons; and finding them all here proceeded to take our lifeboats aboard. At 11.19 p.m. proceeded towards Langemak. Our running lights were on medium bright. *Geelong* had no navigation lights on.

*York* arrived at Langemak at 7.20 a.m. on the 19th; *Geelong*'s survivors were landed there, and taken on to Milne Bay by aircraft, and by H.M.A.S. *Ararat*.

## II

On 21st November 1944, the day after *ML827* broke adrift from the salvage tug *Cambrian Salvor* and sank off Jacquinot Bay, New Britain, the British submarine *Tantalus*,<sup>8</sup> some 3,100 miles to the westward, made a periscope reconnaissance of Merapas Island, about 70 miles south-east of Singapore. Her action was the prelude to the final scene of the penultimate act in the operation RIMAU drama, the sequel to operation JAYWICK, the raiding voyage of the *Krait* to Singapore in September and October 1943.

"Operation RIMAU," says Ronald McKie in his excellent book on the two operations, "was the child of JAYWICK and of Ivan Lyon's compulsion to attack Singapore, for the *Krait* raid was only just over when he was already planning to return."<sup>9</sup> RIMAU differed in a number of ways from JAYWICK. Instead of using a surface craft for transport from Australia, it was planned that the approach to the vicinity of Singapore would be by submarine. Reaching the islands just south of Singapore, a local craft would be captured for the final approach to the launching place of the attack on Singapore shipping, and this would be made, not in two-man paddled canoes as in JAYWICK, but in "Sleeping Beauties"—one-man electrically powered submersible boats. Using these, it was planned to affix limpet mines to ships in Singapore harbour as in the previous raid.

Exhaustive and selective training for RIMAU was carried out over a period of some months at Careening Bay, Garden Island, south of Fremantle. Lieut-Colonel Ivan Lyon was in charge of the operation, as in JAYWICK; and again Lieut-Commander Donald Davidson was second-in-command. Captain Page was a third member of JAYWICK to join RIMAU; and there were three others who had had the experience of the previous raid, Able Seamen Falls, Huston and Marsh. The rest of the 23 who

<sup>8</sup> HMS *Tantalus*, submarine (1943), 1,090 tons, one 4-in gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 15½ kts.

<sup>9</sup> *The Heroes* (1960), p. 194.

formed the RIMAU party were newcomers—survivors of the strenuous training which weeded out so many of those who volunteered for this special service.<sup>1</sup>

On 10th August 1944 the British mine-laying submarine *Porpoise*<sup>2</sup> (Commander H. A. L. Marsham) of the 4th Flotilla, arrived at Fremantle from Trincomalee. On 11th September she sailed from Careening Bay carrying the 23 members of RIMAU; Major W. W. Chapman of the Royal Engineers, who had been associated with the JAYWICK operation and was now the “conducting officer”, to supervise the dropping of the RIMAU party and then return to Australia to organise their recovery; 15 Sleeping Beauties; four folding assault boats; supplies; ammunition; and limpet mines. The considerable delay at Fremantle—one month—was occasioned by the late arrival of the special containers for the Sleeping Beauties. It entailed a modification of the original plan.

*Porpoise* followed the route taken by *Krait* the previous year; and entered the Java Sea via Lombok Strait. She approached the China Sea through Karimata Strait, and on 23rd September, twelve days after leaving Careening Bay, reached Merapas Island. In the late afternoon *Porpoise* made a periscope reconnaissance of the island and, it appearing all clear, surfaced at dusk. Davidson and Corporal Stewart<sup>3</sup> landed and examined Merapas Island, only a mile long and half a mile at its greatest width, and found it uninhabited, and suitable for a base. It was now too late to land supplies, and *Porpoise* withdrew to deeper water until dusk on the 24th. Then, when she circled the island prior to the supplies being landed, three Malays were seen beside a canoe on the beach. It was decided, however, since the beach where it was intended to land the supplies was at the other end of the island, and the Malays were probably only stray visitors, that the decision to make Merapas the expedition's rear base should stand. But whereas it had originally been intended to hide the supplies on the island and leave them untended, it was now arranged that Lieutenant Carey<sup>4</sup> would stay alone on the island to guard the supplies against their despoilment by such visiting Malays. The supplies consisted of sealed tins containing enough for the RIMAU party for three months. Also landed during the night were a radio receiver, 200 Dutch gold guilders, and guns, ammunition, and grenades for Carey.

Early next morning, the supplies and Carey having been landed, *Porpoise* left Merapas and after examining, on the 26th, Pedjantan, an uninhabited island just north of the equator and midway between the

<sup>1</sup> They were: Major R. N. Ingleton, Royal Marines, SEAC representative; Lieutenants W. G. Carey, AIF, B. P. Raymond, RANR, H. R. Ross, British Army, and A. L. Sargent, AIF; Sub-Lieutenant J. G. M. Riggs, RNVN; Warrant Officers A. Warren and J. Willersdorf, Sergeants C. B. Cameron and D. P. Gooley, Corporals A. G. P. Campbell, C. M. Craft, R. B. Fletcher, H. J. Pace and C. M. Stewart, Lance-Corporal J. T. Hardy, and Private D. R. Warne, all of the AIF.

<sup>2</sup> HMS *Porpoise*, mine-laying submarine (1933), 1,500 tons, one 4-in gun, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 15 kts. Sunk in Malacca Strait, 16 Jan 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Cpl C. M. Stewart, WX15839. 1 Sqn Sigs; SRD (“Z” Special Unit). Railway employee; of Mosman Park, WA; b. Southern Cross, WA, 17 Feb 1910. Executed by Japanese 7 Jul 1945.

<sup>4</sup> Lt W. G. Carey, NX58159. 2/2 Bn; SRD (“Z” Special Unit). Trader; of Abbotsford, NSW; b. Campbelltown, NSW, 7 Dec 1913. Executed by Japanese 7 Jul 1945.

Lingga Archipelago and Pontianak in Borneo, she made further eastward in search of the suitable local craft in which the RIMAU party would make its final approach to Singapore. This craft was found on the 28th, when, near the small island of Datu, about 30 miles off Pontianak, *Porpoise* intercepted *Mustika*, a 100-ton Canton-type junk, making out from the coast. She was boarded by seven of the RIMAU party, led by Lyon and Davidson. The nine Malays on board offered no resistance and, sailing by day and towed by *Porpoise* by night, *Mustika* was taken to Pedjantan, where the two vessels arrived in the afternoon of 29th September. There the RIMAU party's operational stores, explosives and equipment, and the Sleeping Beauties, were transferred from *Porpoise* to the junk. The junk's captain and crew, who could not be put ashore for fear that they would endanger operation RIMAU, were transferred to *Porpoise* in charge of Major Chapman. Their place in *Mustika* was taken by the 22 operatives.

Early on 1st October, *Porpoise* and *Mustika* parted, after arrangements had been made for the RIMAU party to be picked up, by submarine, from Merapas on 8th November. Should they not be picked up on that date, they were at liberty to make their own arrangements for escape. So *Mustika* hoisted her sails and sailed westward for Singapore, and *Porpoise*—with Major Chapman and the *Mustika*'s crew on board—set course for Australia. It was the last time that those of the RIMAU party were seen by men of their own race.

### III

*Porpoise* reached Fremantle on 11th October. There Major Chapman handed over the captain and crew of *Mustika*. He himself, with a Corporal Croton as assistant, sailed four days later in the British submarine *Tantalus* (Lieut-Commander H. S. Mackenzie) to keep the rendezvous appointment with the RIMAU party at Merapas Island on 8th November. *Tantalus* was not a minelayer, but was on offensive patrol. She entered the Java Sea through Lombok Strait, and commenced her offensive operations, which she was not due to abandon in order to pick up the RIMAU party until 7th November. When that date arrived she still had on board 15 torpedoes, and fuel and stores for another fortnight's patrolling and, after consultation with Major Chapman, her commanding officer decided that, since the orders for the RIMAU party were that they might expect to be picked up at any time within a month after the initial date, he would continue his patrol while domestic circumstances permitted, and make the Merapas rendezvous on 21st-22nd November.

On 21st November *Tantalus* made a periscope reconnaissance of Merapas, and at 1 a.m. on the 22nd disembarked Major Chapman and Corporal Croton in a canoe 500 yards off shore. *Tantalus* then put to sea. She returned to the early morning point of disembarkation, off the north-west corner of Merapas, at 9.30 that night. Soon a canoe was sighted leaving the shore. It contained Major Chapman and Corporal Croton. They had seen no sign of the RIMAU party on the island, but found evidence of the whole party having been there and having, apparently, left in a hurry.



The evidence suggested that they had left the island at least fourteen days previously. No message had been left, and there was no sign of any fight or struggle. Major Chapman and the captain of *Tantalus* agreed that nothing could be gained by staying in the vicinity and trying again at a later date; and late that night of 22nd November, *Tantalus* sailed from Merapas for Australia, thus bringing down the curtain on the penultimate act of operation RIMAU. It would not rise again to disclose the scenes of the final act until after the Japanese surrendered at Singapore, ten months ahead.

## CHAPTER 19

### SUBMARINES' SWANSONG

THE second half of 1944 saw the collapse of the enemy submarine campaign in the Indian Ocean though, for the first two months of the period, that ocean was the principal area of Allied shipping losses to submarine attack. Most of the sinkings were by German U-boats which arrived in the Indian Ocean in June (*U 181*, *U 196*, *U 198* and *U 859*), and July (*U 861* and *U 862*). The Japanese *I 8* opened the ball on 2nd July, with the sinking of the American ship *Jean Nicolet* (7,176 tons) bound from Fremantle to Colombo, about 190 miles S.S.E. of Addu Atoll. But by then the Japanese effort had been spent. In September only three boats remained based on Penang. The situation in the Pacific was such that the main strength of the Japanese submarine force had to be concentrated there, in accordance with Japanese doctrine, to cooperate against the American fleet. Of the five ships—the first being *Jean Nicolet*—sunk in the Indian Ocean in July, four were the victims of *U 181*, *U 196* and *U 198*.

The *U 198* scored the first U-boat successes in August, when the Germans sank eight British ships and one American. On the 5th and 7th of the month *U 198* sank two British ships, *Empire City* (7,295 tons) and *Empire Day* (7,242 tons), off the East African coast in the latitudes of Cape Delgado and Dar-es-Salaam. This led to an exhaustive search by a hunting group of two escort carriers *Begum* and *Shah*,<sup>1</sup> four frigates, and two Royal Indian Navy sloops, and *U 198* was tracked down and sunk in the vicinity of the Seychelles on 12th August. Between the 13th and 19th of the month *U 862* sank four ships off Madagascar. On the 20th *U 861* sank the *Berwickshire* (7,464 tons)—the only ship of the nine to be sunk in convoy—about 400 miles E.S.E. of Durban. The American ship in the August sinkings, *John Barry* (7,176 tons), fell to a torpedo from *U 859* on 28th August, as did the British *Troilus* on the 31st, some 300 miles east of Socotra. The U-boat did not long survive her victims. On 23rd September, just as she was entering Penang, she was torpedoed and sunk by the British submarine *Trenchant*.<sup>2</sup>

Only three more ships were sunk by submarines in the Indian Ocean in 1944. On 5th September the Greek *Ioannis Fafalios* (5,670 tons) was sunk about 250 miles east of Mombasa by *U 861*. It was the only Indian Ocean loss during the month and no ships were sunk there in October. The last two losses of the year were in November. On the 2nd the American tanker *Fort Lee* (10,198 tons), bound from Abadan for Brisbane, was sunk by *U 861* east of Mauritius. Fifty members of the crew, from three

<sup>1</sup> HMS's *Begum* and *Shah*, escort carriers (1942-43), 11,420 tons, two 5-in guns, 20 aircraft, 16 kts.

<sup>2</sup> HMS *Trenchant* (1943), 1,090 tons, one 4-in gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 15½ kts.

lifeboats, were picked up and landed at Albany and Fremantle. On 5th November the British *Marion Moller* (3,827 tons) was torpedoed and sunk about 100 miles north of Trincomalee. Because of bad coal she had straggled from a Colombo to Calcutta convoy. H.M.A.S. *Norman* (Lieut-Commander Plunkett-Cole) took part in the rescue of her entire complement of 71. In company with British destroyers *Roebuck*, *Quadrant* and *Quality*, *Norman* arrived at the scene of the sinking on the evening of the 6th. The survivors were embarked in *Roebuck*, after which the ships carried out an unsuccessful A/S search.

Meanwhile matters were made more difficult for the German submarines operating in the Indian Ocean, and the mining of the approaches to Penang by R.A.F. Liberator aircraft led the Commander-in-Chief U-boats at Wilhelmshaven, to transfer the Far Eastern Base to Batavia in October. This move was a preliminary to the withdrawal of the boats from what was now an unprofitable area. Ten of them remained in Eastern waters in October—*U 168*, *U 181*, *U 183*, *U 196*, *U 510*, *U 532*, *U 537*, *U 843*, *U 861* and *U 862*. They were ordered to load up with raw materials including tin, wolfram, opium and quinine, and sail for home by mid-January at latest. None of them succeeded in reaching Germany.

First to leave, and first to be lost, was *U 168*, which was sunk by the Dutch submarine *Zwaardvisch*<sup>3</sup> near the coast of Java on 5th October. On 9th November *U 537* was caught on the surface off Bali by the American submarine *Flounder*, and destroyed with two torpedoes. *U 196* left Batavia on 11th November and sank in Sunda Strait, possibly after striking a mine. *U 510*, *U 532*, *U 843* and *U 861* reached Europe. *U 843* was sunk in April 1945 while on the last leg of her voyage from Bergen to Kiel. *U 510* surrendered at St Nazaire on 24th April, and *U 532* surrendered at Liverpool in May. *U 861* reached Trondheim in Norway on 18th April. *U 183* was torpedoed by the American submarine *Besugo*<sup>4</sup> in the Java Sea on 23rd April 1945.

In December 1944 two large transport U-boats, *U 195* and *U 219*, reached Batavia from France. They, and *U 181* and *U 862*, remained in the Far East when Germany surrendered, and were taken over by the Japanese and given "I" numbers. But none saw service before the surrender of Japan. But to one of them, *U 862*, belongs the distinction of being the last enemy submarine of the 1939-45 war to sink a ship on the Australian coast, and one in the Indian Ocean.

*U 862*'s commanding officer, Korvetten Kapitän Heinrich Timm, was a former merchant service officer who had sailed in Australian waters before the war. He left Batavia on 17th November 1944 to operate off the west coast of Australia, and then continued along the south coast to the south of Sydney.<sup>5</sup> Here, on 24th December 1944, he claimed to

<sup>3</sup> *Zwaardvisch*, Dutch submarine (1943), 1,170 tons, one 4-in gun, eleven 21-in torpedo tubes, 15 kts.

<sup>4</sup> *Flounder* and *Besugo*, US submarines (1943-44), 1,526 tons, one 3, 4 or 5-in gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 20 kts.

<sup>5</sup> This information, supplied by the Historical Section of The Admiralty, came from the captured German Naval Staff diary. (U-Bootskriegführung, Dezember 1944-April 1945.) Ref. No. PG.31752.

have sunk an American Liberty ship and on 6th February 1945, while returning to Batavia, a second Liberty ship, 700 miles west of Perth. He also stated that an attack on a tanker off the South Australian coast was frustrated by aircraft.

It was by this last-mentioned attack that *U 862* first made known her presence in Australian waters. At 10 minutes past midday on 9th December, when off Cape Jaffa, about 130 miles S by E of Adelaide, the Greek s.s. *Ilissos* (4,724 tons) broadcast that she was being attacked by an unidentified submarine. An hour later she amplified this by saying that the submarine had submerged when she had fired back. She was ordered by Navy Office, Melbourne, to continue her voyage to that port, and in the meantime naval and air support and search operations were instituted.

At this stage of the war, with the front some distance from Australia and moving progressively farther away as the Japanese perimeter shrank under mounting Allied pressure, the problem of the removal of minefields came to the forefront. There were not only those laid in Australian waters as defence measures, but also those laid by the Japanese in waters occupied by them. It became necessary to form minesweeping flotillas, and the virtual elimination of the submarine menace in Australian waters and in the Indian Ocean—allied to the provision in the Indian Ocean of more, and more suitable, escort vessels—made it possible to withdraw some of the corvettes from escort work and assign them to that for which they were originally designed—minesweeping.

Early in the war, in December 1939, the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla, comprising H.M.A. Ships *Swan*, *Yarra*, *Orara* and *Doomba*, had been formed. Other ships joined it from time to time, and its composition changed as circumstances demanded.<sup>6</sup> Throughout 1940 and 1941 the 20th M.S. Flotilla carried out sweeping operations, removing the minefields laid by the German surface raiders of those years, and conducting searching sweeps. With the entry of Japan into the war, the ships then comprising the flotilla were required for other duties, and its operations ceased until it was re-formed in 1945.

In addition to the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla there were, throughout the war, minesweeping groups based on Australian ports. They were made up of auxiliary minesweepers and, as did the 20th Flotilla, changed their composition from time to time as vessels were attached or withdrawn.<sup>7</sup> When the corvettes, officially designated A.S.-M.S. vessels, were first being built, they were allocated to the 21st and 22nd Minesweeping Flotillas, but actually their minesweeping operations were restricted to those of individual ships which served with the 20th Flotilla, as stated above, and with the 24th Flotilla. This flotilla, based on Darwin, comprised corvettes that served there from time to time. But except for occasional routine

<sup>6</sup> Ships which for various periods during 1940 and 1941 served in the 20th MS Flotilla were: *Ballarat*, *Bathurst*, *Burnie*, *Doomba*, *Goulburn*, *Lithgow*, *Maryborough*, *Mildura*, *Orara*, *Parramatta*, *Swan*, *Warrego*, *Warrnambool*, *Yarra*.

<sup>7</sup> The MS groups were: Sydney, MS Group 50; Melbourne, MS Group 54; Hobart, MS Group 60; Adelaide, MS Group 63; Fremantle, MS Group 66; Darwin, MS Group 70; Brisbane, MS Group 74; Newcastle, MS Group 77.

sweeping operations in the searched channel, these ships were employed in anti-submarine and convoy escort duties.<sup>8</sup>

In August 1944 a start was made on the clearing of the defensive minefields laid by *Bungaree* from 1942 to 1943, in the various passages through the Great Barrier Reef. These clearing sweeps were designated "The Kills". The first five, comprising "Kilnick", 1st to 5th August, "Kilbuck", 10th to 14th August, "Kilhop", 16th to 19th August, "Kilcoaster", 22nd to 27th August and 1st to 5th September, and "Kilnat", 20th to 27th September, were carried out by H.M.A. Ships *Kalgoorlie* (Lieutenant Peel) and *Pirie* (Lieutenant Thomson<sup>9</sup>). In between sweeping operations—as a result of which a total of 491 mines were swept—the two ships returned to Thursday Island for stores, water and fuel. A further and final search was made in the "Kilcoaster" area by *Kalgoorlie* and *Townsville* (Lieutenant Brackenbridge<sup>1</sup>) between 20th and 27th November 1944.

Meanwhile, on 26th October 1944 the Admiralty signalled to the Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet, and to the Naval Board, that two flotillas of minesweepers would be required for the defence of advanced bases of the British Pacific Fleet. The signal continued:

It would be appreciated if ACNB would make available the five RN *Bathursts* fitted oropesa now on Australia Station to form 21st MSF. C-in-C Eastern Fleet is requested (a) to sail four RN oropesa *Bathursts* as soon as convenient to join 21st MSF, (b) to form 22nd MSF of nine RN *Bathursts* fitted L.L. Flotillas will each be nine strong, allowing one vessel to be used for danlaying.

Prompt action was taken to meet these requests, and the nine ships to form the 21st Minesweeping Flotilla were soon concentrated in Australia. They were *Toowoomba*, *Burnie*, *Lismore* and *Maryborough* of the Eastern Fleet; *Ballarat*, *Goulburn*, *Kalgoorlie*, *Whyalla* and *Bendigo* on the Australia Station. Early in December *Ballarat* (Commander Morris), Senior Officer of the Flotilla, *Goulburn* (Lieut-Commander Collins), *Kalgoorlie* (Lieut-Commander McBryde, who had succeeded Peel in command on 26th November), and *Whyalla* (Commander Read) were in Sydney. *Bendigo* (Lieutenant Jackson<sup>2</sup>) was in Brisbane, refitting. On 18th November *Toowoomba* (Lieut-Commander Simpson), *Burnie* (Lieut-Commander Andrewartha), *Lismore* (Lieutenant Lever) and *Maryborough* (Lieutenant Boyle) left Colombo for Fremantle, where they arrived on 2nd December. *Toowoomba* remained in the Western Australian port to refit, and the other three sailed for eastern Australia.

On 9th December *Burnie*, *Lismore* and *Maryborough* were off Cape Nelson, Victoria, some 130 miles south-east of where *Ilissos* encountered

<sup>8</sup> Corvettes which were from time to time units of the 24th MS Flotilla were: *Armidale*, *Bowen*, *Bunbury*, *Castlemaine*, *Cootamundra*, *Deloraine*, *Fremantle*, *Inverell*, *Kalgoorlie*, *Latrobe*, *Lithgow*, *Parkes*, *Pirie*, *Townsville*, *Warnambool*, *Wilcannia*.

<sup>9</sup> Lt D. S. Thomson, RANR. HMAS's *Bungaree* and *Horsham*; comd HMAS's *Pirie* 1943-44 and *Lismore* 1945. B. Sydney, 1 Jan 1906.

<sup>1</sup> Lt A. B. Brackenbridge, RANR. HMAS *Westralia*; comd HMAS *Townsville* 1944. Of Mosman Park, WA; b. Sunderland, England, 21 Aug 1904.

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Cdr W. Jackson, RANVR. HMAS's *Kapunda* and *Vendetta*; comd HMAS *Bendigo* 1944-46. Of Hobart; b. Dover, Tas, 28 Oct 1907.

*U 862*. The weather was bad, and the three corvettes were making only seven knots on passage to Melbourne. At 1 p.m. on the 9th Andrewartha in *Burnie* was ordered by signal from N.O.I.C. Port Melbourne to take *Lismore* and *Maryborough* under his command and search for and attack the submarine. Soon after receiving the signal *Lismore* suffered an engine breakdown, and Andrewartha detached her to proceed to Melbourne, where she arrived on the evening of the 10th on one engine. *Burnie* and *Maryborough* met *Ilissos* about 7 p.m. on the 9th. Neither the Greek ship nor an escorting aircraft had anything further to report. The two corvettes searched for the submarine fruitlessly until noon on the 10th, when they were ordered to resume passage to Port Phillip. They arrived on the evening of the 11th, about 24 hours after *Ilissos*, whose report to N.O.I.C. Port Melbourne was graded A1.

The air and surface searches for *U 862* had produced negative results, but as a safety measure all shipping, except local traffic between Newcastle, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide, was routed south of Tasmania; ships were ordered to darken ship at night when west of 150 degrees East except when in the immediate vicinity of Wilson's Promontory; to zigzag in southern Australian waters; to stream paravanes when within the 200-fathom line between Newcastle and Fremantle; and to maintain radio silence. *Burnie*, *Maryborough* and *Lismore*, which were due to go to Sydney to join the 21st Flotilla, were retained in the Melbourne area to sweep the shipping routes in Bass Strait. They commenced sweeping operations—with negative results—on the 12th. The four ships of the 21st Flotilla in Sydney were ordered to proceed to Melbourne, where they arrived on 18th December. During the passage search sweeps were carried out outside Sydney, and from Wilson's Promontory to Port Phillip. Again no mines were discovered.

## II

On 1st December 1944 H.M.A.S. *Quiberon* (Commander Harrington) sailed from Colombo as a unit of the 4th Destroyer Flotilla in company with H.M. Ships *Quilliam* (D4), *Quality* and *Quadrant*, screening the battleship H.M.S. *Howe*, Flagship of the British Pacific Fleet, on passage to Fremantle, which they reached on 11th December. In the early hours of the 24th the 4th Flotilla secured alongside at Williamstown. It was here, at 5 a.m. on 25th December, that D4 was ordered by Commander South-West Pacific Sea Frontiers—Admiral Royle—to proceed with the flotilla with all dispatch to position 36 degrees five minutes South, 150 degrees 43 minutes East (40 miles off the New South Wales coast, 85 miles south of Jervis Bay) to hunt a possible submarine.

These orders resulted from an "S.O.S." submarine alarm broadcast which confirmed the report of the *Ilissos*. At 2.52 a.m. on 25th December Navy Office received an emergency S.O.S. from the American ship *Robert J. Walker* (7,180 tons), Fremantle to Sydney, reporting that she had been torpedoed in the above position, and asking for air cover and

immediate assistance. About an hour later *Robert J. Walker*, in an amplifying signal, said that the ship was afloat and apparently not taking much water, the rudder had gone and a big hole was blown in the steering engine room. "Everybody aboard no casualties. Send air coverage and tug to tow us in." Two minutes after the foregoing, she sent another S.O.S. "Enemy attacking."

Meanwhile, in addition to the 4th Destroyer Flotilla in Melbourne, the ships of the 21st M.S. Flotilla, also in that port, were ordered to raise steam immediately. At 4.15 a.m. aircraft at Rathmines were instructed to conduct a search. And in Sydney U.S.S. *PC597*<sup>3</sup> and H.M.A. Ships *Quickmatch*, *Kiama* and *Yandra* were directed to proceed as soon as possible, *Quickmatch* and *Yandra* to operate against the submarine and *Kiama* to take *Robert J. Walker* in tow. In addition, *M.L.'s* 822 and 823 and *HDML1341* at Jervis Bay were dispatched to the position of the attack.

First contact with the stricken ship was at 6.15 a.m. on the 25th, by one of the searching aircraft, which reported sighting her with two empty lifeboats one mile north. Visibility was only one to one-and-a-half miles. A second aircraft report about 6.55 a.m. said that nine boats or rafts had been sighted. *PC597*, first to get away from Sydney at 7.35 a.m., was the first surface vessel on the scene of the attack at 6.34 p.m. on the 25th. She found *Robert J. Walker* abandoned, with approximately 60 feet draft aft and minus 10 feet draft forward, her stern awash to the bridge. After cruising close aboard on both sides searching for survivors in the ship, *PC597* started a search for the submarine and the ship's missing crew.

H.M.A.S. *Quickmatch* (Commander Becher<sup>4</sup>) and *Kiama* (Lieut-Commander Benson) reached the scene between 11.30 p.m. and midnight on the 25th, and patrolled in the vicinity, seeking the submarine and the ship's company. Sixty-seven men were located in life-boats and on rafts at 5.45 a.m. on the 26th, and were taken on board *Quickmatch*. Two of the ship's company were lost. In the meantime *Robert J. Walker* had sunk at 3 a.m. on 26th December. For some hours *Kiama* and *Yandra* and the ships of the 4th Destroyer Flotilla and the 21st Minesweeping Flotilla swept the area and its vicinity, searching for the submarine and mines. But the search was fruitless.

From subsequent reports by Captain M. D. MacRae, master of the torpedoed ship, and members of the crew and the armed guard on board, *Robert J. Walker*, just after 2 a.m. on 25th December, was in position 36 degrees 35 minutes South, 154 degrees 43 minutes East, steering N by E at 10.8 knots. She was outside the 100 fathom line, was not zigzagging, and showed no lights. The night was hazy and moonless, wind NE of moderate force, sea choppy. Visibility was medium to poor, due to haze and dust storm.

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<sup>3</sup> *PC597*, US patrol craft (1942-44), 280 tons, one or two 3-in guns, 18 kts.

<sup>4</sup> Rear-Adm O. H. Becher, CBE, DSO, DSC; RAN. HMS *Devonshire* 1939-40; HMAS *Napier* 1940-42; comd HMAS *Quickmatch* 1944-45. B. Harvey, WA, 13 Sept 1908.

At 2.18 a.m. a torpedo hit the ship on the starboard quarter, and the explosion tore off the rudder, badly damaged the after steering gear, and flooded the shaft tunnel. The ship's crew and armed guard went to action stations. The ship took little water, but was unmanoeuvrable. An S.O.S. message was broadcast at 2.30 a.m. At about 4.20 a.m. a second torpedo was seen at a distance of about half-a-mile approaching the starboard quarter. It was exploded about 100 yards from the ship by 20-mm gunfire. Just before 6 a.m. a third torpedo was sighted at about 3,000 yards. All starboard guns opened fire but could not stop the torpedo, which struck the ship's starboard side at No. 4 hold and blew out both sides of the ship. The captain said that "two army trucks could have been driven in one side of the ship and out the other". Abandon ship was ordered at 6.1 a.m., and the crew—with the exception of two men lost—got away in three lifeboats and four rafts. The boats were rowed about two miles from the ship, which drifted southwards and was lost to sight about three hours after being abandoned. The boats and rafts kept together within a radius of about three miles until, 24 hours after abandoning ship, the survivors were picked up by *Quickmatch* at 5.45 a.m. on the 26th.

Captain MacRae was critical of the fact that the first aircraft contact with the ship was not until 6.15 a.m. on 25th December, nearly four hours after the distress message in which air cover had been requested. He commented that daylight came at 4 a.m. The distance off shore—SE by E of Narooma—was about 35 to 40 miles, and the distance of the ship from Sydney was 160 miles. "If an aircraft had arrived even as late as 5 a.m. it would in all probability have prevented the second torpedo hit, and the ship could easily have been towed to safety."

### III

On 28th January 1945 information was received by Intelligence Section, Western Area, of a possible enemy submarine in the general area to the south-west of Fremantle, and proceeding north-west. At the request of the N.O.I.C. Fremantle (Commodore Pope) a search by Liberator aircraft of the R.A.A.F. was carried out over an area of 160 miles radius to the south-west and west of Cape Leeuwin, on successive days between 29th and 31st January. No sightings were made. The day the enemy submarine intelligence was received in Western Australia the American Liberty ship *Peter Sylvester* (7,176 tons) sailed from Melbourne for Colombo. It was fortunate for those on board that at about the same date another American vessel sailed from Colombo for Melbourne.

On 10th February 1945 H.M.A.S. *Leeuwin*, Fremantle naval base, received via the Naval Board a signal from the American ship *Cape Edmont*, Colombo to Melbourne, that she had rescued 15 survivors from the *Peter Sylvester*, which had been torpedoed in position 34 degrees 19 minutes South, 99 degrees 37 minutes East (820 miles W by S of Fremantle) at a few minutes before midnight on 6th February. The signal also stated that three boats and possibly four rafts were still afloat, and



that the after part of the ship was still floating, forming a menace to navigation.

Commodore Pope sailed U.S.S. *Corpus Christi*<sup>5</sup> (in charge of the operation) and H.M.A.S. *Dubbo* (Lieutenant Roberts<sup>6</sup>) to the vicinity of the attack to search for survivors and to tow back or destroy, at discretion, the derelict if found. Arrangements were made for two R.A.A.F. Liberator aircraft and an R.A.F. Catalina to help with the search from dawn on 11th February. Information from *Cape Edmont* that she had picked up the survivors in position 33 degrees 34 minutes South, 99 degrees eight minutes East, 45 miles north-west of the position of the torpedoing, gave an indication of the drift, and was passed to searching ships and other authorities.

At 8 a.m. on the 11th the searching Liberator aircraft sighted two rafts containing some 20 men about 30 miles north-westward of where *Cape Edmont* had picked up her survivors. The aircraft dropped supplies, and the Ammunition Supply Issuing Ship *Darvel* (1,929 tons), approaching the area from the north bound for Fremantle, was given the position of the rafts and asked to keep a lookout for them. C-in-C Eastern Fleet, Vice-Admiral Power, on the 11th directed the aircraft carriers *Slinger* and *Speaker*,<sup>7</sup> on passage from Colombo to Sydney to join the British Pacific Fleet Train, to help in the search.

About midnight on the 11th *Cape Edmont* arrived at Fremantle, carrying survivors of the *Peter Sylvester* from whom some details of the attack were obtained. The ship, with a crew of 42, an armed guard of 26, and 107 officers and men of the American Army, was carrying 317 mules and 2,700 tons of cargo, mostly hay. She was attacked without warning on a dark night with obscured moon, with visibility of about two-and-a-half miles. She was not zigzagging. The first indication of attack was the arrival of the initial salvo of two torpedoes, which struck on the starboard side abreast No. 3 hold. All lights went out. The ship stopped. All electric circuits were grounded by the explosion, so that the wireless could not be used, and no "submarine attack" message was broadcast. About 30 minutes after the first salvo a second, also of two torpedoes, hit between Nos. 2 and 3 holds on the starboard side, and another 30 minutes had passed when a third two-torpedo salvo hit the ship in about the same position. The forward section of the ship broke away and sank. The ship's master, Captain Dennis, then ordered abandon ship. Of those on board, 32 were believed to have been killed or drowned before ship was abandoned. The remainder, 143, got away in four lifeboats and on six life rafts.

Air searches on the 12th were negative, except for the sight of wreckage. *Corpus Christi* arrived in the area and commenced searching about 8 p.m. On 13th February air searches were conducted by one Catalina aircraft

<sup>5</sup> *Corpus Christi*, US escort vessel (1943), 1,100 tons, three 3-in guns, 18 kts.

<sup>6</sup> Lt-Cdr F. W. Roberts, RD; RANR. Comd HMAS's *Cairns* 1943-44 and *Dubbo* 1944-46. Ship's officer; of Sydney; b. Liverpool, England, 17 Dec 1912.

<sup>7</sup> HMS's *Slinger* and *Speaker*, aircraft carriers (1942-43), 11,420 tons, two 5-in guns, 20 aircraft, 16 kts.

and one Liberator; the Liberator sighted two rafts and one lifeboat and succeeded in guiding *Corpus Christi* to them. About 9 a.m. the ship picked up 62 survivors from four rafts which were lashed together in 33 degrees 14 minutes South, 98 degrees 30 minutes East. This position, to the north-west of that where *Cape Edmont* made her initial discovery, confirmed the north-westerly drift which had been indicated. In a further signal during the day, *Corpus Christi* reported that she had picked up another 31 survivors, including the captain, from two rafts and one lifeboat.

*Slinger* and *Speaker* entered the area and commenced searching, and *Darvel* searched as she passed through the area, but sighted nothing and continued on to Fremantle. The Blue Funnel *Idomeneus* (7,792 tons) also passed through the area from the north on her way to Fremantle. She sighted an abandoned lifeboat, which was that originally seen by *Cape Edmont*. In the afternoon of the 13th, H.M.A.S. *Dubbo* began her search; and Pope sailed U.S.S. *Hutchinson*<sup>8</sup> and H.M.A.S. *Warrnambool* (Lieut-Commander Wight) from Fremantle. At the end of the day there were two lifeboats still unaccounted for, and these were understood to be making for Australia.

There was an unfortunate happening on the 14th when one of the two Liberator aircraft assigned to the search, heavily loaded with fuel for the task, crashed on taking off, and five of the crew were killed. As a result, further participation by Liberators after the 14th was cancelled. *Slinger's* aircraft saw only searching ships, the empty lifeboat, the six rafts, wreckage and a number of mules. It appeared that the derelict after-portion of *Peter Sylvester* had sunk. On the assumption that the two missing boats were making for Australia, Pope suggested that when the searches planned for the 15th were completed, the areas searched could be considered clear and that on the 16th searches should commence at position 31 degrees 30 minutes South and 103 degrees 25 minutes East. This took into account the indicated drift and the South East Trades which were blowing, steadily for direction but at strengths varying from light airs to fresh wind. The sea was generally choppy, with a heavy swell.

Search areas were detailed for the individual ships, but searches on the 16th and 17th were negative. On that day H.M.A.S. *Castlemaine* (Lieut-Commander Collins), on passage Darwin to Fremantle, was directed to look out for the missing boats, and all coastal authorities as far north as Derby were similarly instructed. Searches on the 18th, 19th, and 20th were negative. *Slinger* and *Speaker* had to resume their voyages to Sydney, and on the 19th air searches by R.A.A.F. Beaufort aircraft were instituted. These were continued, with negative results, for five days after the 20th. N.O.I.C. Fremantle then abandoned the surface search and recalled the ships to Fremantle.

On 28th February the escort carrier *Activity*<sup>9</sup> reported picking up, at

<sup>8</sup> *Hutchinson*, US escort vessel (1943), 1,100 tons, three 3-in DP guns, 18 kts.

<sup>9</sup> *HMS Activity*, escort carrier (1942), 11,800 tons, two 4-in AA and twenty 20-mm AA guns, 15 aircraft, 18 kts.

midday that day, one of the two missing lifeboats, with 20 survivors. The boat, bound for Australia, was in 26 degrees 48 minutes South, 101 degrees 58 minutes East, about 600 miles west of Shark Bay. It had failed to make the easting expected of it by those planning the searches. On the 28th, C-in-C Eastern Fleet ordered H.M. Ships *Formidable* and *Uganda*,<sup>1</sup> bound for Australia, to pass through the area of *Activity*'s sighting and to search for the other boat. *Activity*'s survivors—whom she landed at Fremantle on 2nd March—said that the missing boat was also bound for Australia.

*Formidable* and *Uganda* arrived at Fremantle on 3rd and 4th March respectively, and both reported no sightings. But on the morning of 10th March the American submarine *Rock*,<sup>2</sup> of Seventh Fleet Submarines, picked up the missing boat, with 15 survivors, 20 miles west of Vlaming Head, North West Cape. The boat, in 32 days, had sailed nearly 1,100 miles in a north-east direction. When rescued, the survivors—who were landed at Exmouth Gulf—had been out of food for some days but still had sufficient water. They were in fair condition except for one man who needed hospital treatment. With the finding of this boat, all six rafts and four lifeboats known to have got away from *Peter Sylvester* were recovered, and with them all the 143 survivors who had successfully abandoned ship.

The torpedoing of *Peter Sylvester* and the search for her survivors was notable for the fact that, owing to her inability to broadcast a submarine alarm message, there was a delay of three days in the institution of the search. And, as Commodore Pope commented in his report to the Naval Board: "No search would ever have been made but for the fortuitous chance of another merchant ship picking up the boat and signalling the information that *Peter Sylvester* had been sunk."

Once that information was received, the search was instituted and carried out in a manner which, for its careful planning, intelligent use of information, and close and informed cooperation resulting from the prompt dissemination of advice by N.O.I.C. Fremantle, reflected credit on all concerned. Though 50 of those rescued were picked up fortuitously by ships not taking part in the organised search—namely the boats found by *Cape Edmont*, *Activity* and *Rock*—the organised search was undoubtedly responsible for the safe recovery of the largest number of survivors by *Corpus Christi*.

Again to quote Commodore Pope's report:

It will be seen that a most extensive search over a very wide area was made by units of the Royal Navy (including naval aircraft), the Royal Australian Navy, the United States Navy, and the Royal Australian Air Force. In addition merchant ships, civil and service aircraft, and large numbers of coastwatchers, police, and citizens in remote areas on the coast were requested to look out for the arrival of boats on the coast. The final result was most gratifying, observing that all personnel are believed to have been saved with the exception of a number killed or drowned at the time of the attack.

<sup>1</sup> HMS *Uganda*, cruiser (1942), 8,000 tons, twelve 6-in guns, eight 4-in AA guns, 3 aircraft, 33 kts.

<sup>2</sup> *Rock*, US submarine (1943), 1,526 tons, one 3, 4 or 5 in. gun, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 20 kts.

As was stated earlier in this volume, the sinking of the American ship *Portmar* and damaging of *LST469* in convoy "GP55" off Smoky Cape on 16th June 1943, marked the last attack of the war by a Japanese submarine in eastern Australian waters. The sinking of *Robert J. Walker* on 25th December 1944, south of Jervis Bay, was the result of the final attack in the war by a submarine in Australian coastal waters; and that of *Peter Sylvester* on 6th February 1945, 820 miles west of Fremantle, was the final submarine attack of the war on the Australia Station and in the Indian Ocean.

With the sinking of *Portmar* in 1943, 18 ships of an aggregate of 79,608 gross tons were sunk by submarine attack on the Australian east coast, with fatal casualties of 465. The loss of *Robert J. Walker* brought these figures to 19 ships, 86,788 tons and 467 fatal casualties. The addition of eleven ships totalling 64,196 tons sunk by submarine attack during the war elsewhere on the Australia Station, brought the total of ships so sunk on the Australia Station (as defined in 1939) during the 1939-45 war to 30,<sup>3</sup> of a total tonnage of 150,984 gross tons. The fatal casualties in these 30 ships were 654, of whom some 200 were Australian merchant seamen.

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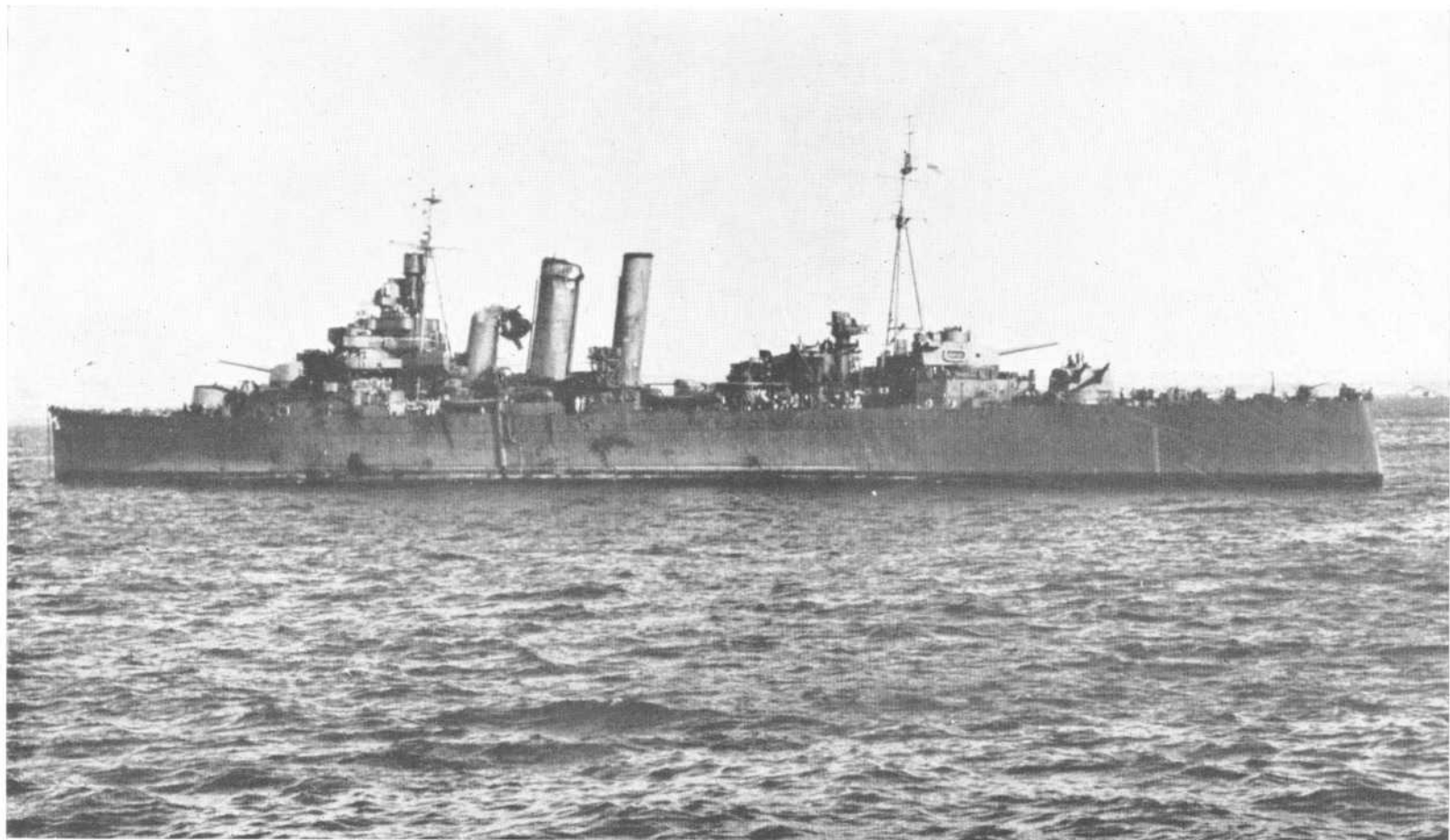
<sup>3</sup> The ships sunk on the Australia Station by submarine attack during the 1939-45 war were: in Eastern Australian coastal waters: *Iron Chieftain*, *Iron Crown*, *Guatemala*, *George S. Livanos*, *Coast Farmer*, *William Dawes*, *Dureenbee*, *Kalingo*, *Iron Knight*, *Starr King*, *Recina*, *Kowarra*, *Lydia M. Childs*, *Limerick*, *Wollongbar*, *Fingal*, *Centaur*, *Portmar*, *Robert J. Walker*. Elsewhere on the Australia Station: *John Adams*, *Chloe*, *Tjinegara*, *Samuel Gompers*, *Aludra*, *Deimos*, *Mamutu*, *Peter Sylvester*, *Stanvac Manila*, *Nam Yong*, *Siantar*.

## CHAPTER 20

### THE R.A.N. IN BURMA

**H**ARD pressed on the east in the Philippines in November 1944, the Japanese now found themselves increasingly under pressure in the west in Burma, where the tide had turned in the Allies' favour. A comparison between maps of the situation in Burma in the first half of 1944 and at the end of the year shows how strongly that tide had run. In March 1944 the Japanese opened their main offensive in the north-west. They crossed the border from Burma into India and besieged Imphal and Kohima, but though the garrisons were hard pressed they received supplies and reinforcements by air and repelled all attacks. Meanwhile the Japanese were suffering severe interference with their supplies as a result of the British air offensive from Indian airfields, and the activities of the Chindits, flown into the Irrawaddy Valley between Indaw and Myitkyina, towards which General Stilwell was advancing southwards from Ledo. By the middle of May the Japanese had been halted, and were faced with the necessity of retreating to the Chindwin River through the monsoon, with their rear communications cut. Their losses were heavy. In June the 2nd British and 5th Indian Divisions met just north of Imphal and, as the Supreme Commander S.E.A.C., Admiral Mountbatten, said in his report at the time: "The Japanese bid for India was virtually over, and ahead lay the prospect of the first major British victory in Burma."

Improved transport and medical treatment enabled the British, contrary to Japanese expectations, to pursue their advance through the monsoon. They crossed the Chindwin River in November and December, and soon the whole Fourteenth Army—the largest single army in the war—was driving eastward towards the plain above Mandalay. With the army now extending its lines of communication, air transport from the Indian airfields would be unable to keep up supplies, and an alternative base had to be found. Akyab, on the Arakan coast, was the choice. From airfields there it would be possible to supply the army as it advanced down the central Burma valleys. Thus Akyab, the last Burmese port from which the British withdrew before the Japanese occupation of the country in May 1942, was to be the first to which the British would return now that the tide of victory had set. As Commodore Cosmo Graham, then Commodore Commanding Burma Coast, said in his report on the naval side of the 1942 campaign, the naval contribution was slight, but the retention of Akyab did ensure that the Japanese could not use the airfield until the safe retreat of the army was ensured and time had been gained to build up an air force in the eastern provinces of India. Now the securing of Akyab was going to provide the British with that air support which had been denied to the Japanese nearly three years before.



H.M.A.S. *Australia*, showing damage incurred in Lingayen Gulf, January 1945.

(R.A.N. Historical Section)



(Keystone Press Agency)

On board *Australia* in England, July 1945. Captain J. M. Armstrong points out to Mr S. M. Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner in London, the propeller of one of the *Kamikaze* aircraft.



(Department of Information)

Captain H. J. Buchanan, Captain (D) 7th Flotilla.

It was decided that an amphibious assault should be launched against Akyab to coincide with an offensive by Lieut-General Christison's<sup>1</sup> XV Corps which was in the area Maungdaw-Buthidaung. These two are separated by twelve miles stretching E.N.E. across the northern base of the Mayu Peninsula, from Maungdaw on the Naf River to Buthidaung on the Kalapanzin. About seven miles south of Maungdaw the Naf River runs into the sea, and from there, S.S.E. 37 miles to its southern extremity of Foul Point, the Mayu Peninsula is bounded by the sea on the west, and the Kalapanzin River and its continuation, the Mayu, on the east. Where the Mayu empties into the sea at Foul Point it joins with the waters of the Kywede River, also there entering the sea from a network of waterways and islands. One of these, four miles across the Mayu-Kywede estuary from Foul Point, is Akyab, on the south-east corner of which lies the harbour and town of that name. For 100 miles south of Akyab the Arakan coast of Burma is broken by indentations and channels lying behind an archipelago of islands, the largest being the Borongas—three long slim fingers stretching S.S.E. from the nether side of the Kaladan River, on the north bank of which is the harbour of Akyab—and, 30 miles S.S.E. from them, Ramree and Cheduba. South of Cheduba the coast stretches, almost clear of offshore islands, some 170 miles to Pagoda Point, south-western extremity of Burma, and of the river-tattered coastal fringe leading to Rangoon, 200 miles to the north-eastward.

Originally the assault on Akyab was planned for 18th February 1945. Naval forces for the operation were under the command of Rear-Admiral B. C. S. Martin, Flag Officer Force W. They consisted of flotillas of landing craft of various categories, M.L.'s, H.D.M.L.'s, frigates and sloops. These would maintain the communications of the army. An offshore and bombardment force—Force 61—under the command of Rear-Admiral A. D. Read, comprised *Queen Elizabeth*, *Newcastle* (Flag), *Nigeria*, *Kenya*, H.M.A. Ships *Napier*, *Nepal*, *Norman*, and two other fleet destroyers, the escort carrier *Ameer*,<sup>2</sup> and 23 personnel and store ships. The troops to be landed were the 26th Indian Division and the 3rd Commando Brigade.

Meanwhile the army in Arakan opened its offensive on 12th December 1944. Of the XV Corps, which carried out the main Arakan offensive, the 25th Division was to advance down the Mayu Peninsula with the 74th Brigade on the right supported and supplied by naval forces, and the 53rd Brigade on the left supplied by boats of the Inland Water Transport from the Mayu and Kalapanzin Rivers. The advance of the 25th Division was rapid. Its lines of communication were secure on its sea flank, despite the Japanese following tactics which had previously been successful, and cutting in behind the division and severing its land communications. On 26th December the 74th Brigade reached Foul Point and, after an advance of 30 miles in 14 days, opened the mouths of the Mayu and

<sup>1</sup> General Sir Philip Christison, GBE, CB, DSO, MC. Comd XXIII and XV Indian Corps 1942-45; C-in-C ALFSEA 1945. Regular soldier; b. 17 Nov 1893.

<sup>2</sup> HMS *Ameer*, escort carrier (1942), 11,420 tons, two 5-in guns, 20 aircraft, 16 kts.



Kywede Rivers for the operations of light naval forces and for seaborne maintenance. In less than three weeks the 25th Division had secured its objectives a fortnight ahead of schedule, and was ready for the occupation of Akyab Island.

In this Arakan campaign the navy had anticipated the army's offensive with operations by coastal forces which started in October 1944. These forces, consisting of flotillas of M.L's, had as their objective the disruption of Japanese communications on the coast, and penetration into enemy-held harbours and waterways so as to interrupt his supply routes. It was a task they carried out with considerable success. With the opening of the army's offensive, another naval side came into being, that of direct support of the army's right flank. This support was afforded by a group consisting of *Napier* and *Nepal* of the 7th Destroyer Flotilla, and two British H.D.M.L's, 1275 and 1303.

## II

During 1944 the ships of the 7th Destroyer Flotilla had refit spells in Australia. Because of the shortage of escort vessels in the Indian Ocean they had been largely divorced from Fleet duties to engage in convoy escort work. Buchanan, in *Norman*, commented on this when at the beginning of the year the Eastern Fleet was built up with the arrival in the Indian Ocean of *Renown*, *Queen Elizabeth*, *Valiant* and *Illustrious*. In his report of proceedings for January 1944 he remarked:

The arrival of Force "A" shows that the Eastern Fleet will at last be able to take an active part in the war at sea, and the realisation of this and the more stimulating atmosphere that goes with a modern fleet unit should do much to shake us out of a state of "convoyitis".

*Norman* arrived in Sydney for refit in April, and on 9th July sailed from Fremantle to resume her duties in the Indian Ocean. She left Australia in company with a tanker, and with the Eastern Fleet corvettes *Cairns* and *Wollongong*, which were also returning to Indian Ocean work after refitting in Australia. August, September and October were spent by *Norman* mainly on convoy escort work—with the break in October when she took part in the diversionary attack on the Nicobar Islands area, of which mention has been made.

*Napier* (Lieut-Commander Green) sailed from Addu Atoll for her refit on 17th July escorting the American tanker *American Arrow* (8,327 tons) towards Fremantle in company with *Tamworth* and *Ipswich*, both bound for a dockyard spell in Australia. The previous month *Napier* broke a long association when, on 4th June, the broad pendant of Commodore Arliss was struck, and that of Commodore Poland, Commodore (D) Eastern Fleet, was hoisted in her. As Captain (D) 7th Flotilla, Arliss commissioned *Napier* at Fairfield's yard on the Clyde in November 1940, and he remained in her when he became Commodore (D) Eastern Fleet in 1942. His successor, Commodore Poland, had earlier association with Australian

destroyers when, during the North African campaign and "Tobruk Ferry" days of 1941, he was S.N.O. Inshore Squadron.

*Napier* refitted in Williamstown dockyard during August and September, during which period *Nepal* (Lieut-Commander Plunkett-Cole) refitted in Sydney. *Nepal* arrived at Williamstown from her refit on 3rd October, and Plunkett-Cole then assumed command of *Napier*, his place in *Nepal* being taken by Lieut-Commander Stephenson, who had relieved Green in command of *Napier* the previous month. The two destroyers sailed from Fremantle to rejoin the Eastern Fleet on 21st October, in company with *Ipswich* and *Tamworth* and tanker *British Fusilier* (6,943 tons), and on 1st November arrived at Trincomalee. As the result of a decision by the Admiralty to transfer the administration of the 7th Flotilla from Commodore (D) to Captain (D) 7th Flotilla, there was now another change in *Napier's* command. Buchanan, from *Norman*, was appointed Captain (D) 7th Flotilla, and he and Plunkett-Cole exchanged commands on 2nd November. November was spent by both ships escorting and exercising. On the 8th of the month *Napier*, while exercising with *Quiberon* off Trincomalee, sighted and took in tow two lifeboats of the *Marion Moller*, sunk by a submarine a few days earlier. And on the 26th *Norman*, in Bombay, "put up a stout effort at cricket" against *Gawler*, according to that ship's letter of proceedings for the month.

During this month *Nizam*, last of the four 7th Flotilla destroyers to proceed to Australia for refit, commenced hers at Williamstown dockyard, and continued until 31st January 1945. She did not again return to the Eastern Fleet.

On 6th December *Napier* arrived at Chittagong, where she was joined next day by *Nepal*, and on the 11th Buchanan and Stephenson flew to Cox's Bazar to discuss with representatives of the army and air force their forthcoming support of the 74th Indian Brigade. The two ships arrived off St Martin's Island, just south of the mouth of the Naf River, on the 13th, and thereafter until Sunday, 24th December, were on call by the 74th Brigade for bombardments as required. On 14th December both ships left their anchorage at St Martin's Island and closed the Arakan coast near Thabyndaw village, where were the 74th Brigade's forward troops. *Napier* answered a call for fire with a bombardment of enemy positions. "It was not," wrote Stephenson in his Report of Proceedings for December, "until 1815 that day, Thursday 14th, that *Nepal* got an opportunity of firing." And he continued:

We then engaged by indirect fire with air observation an enemy position on the Udaung Chaung. It was a successful shoot and believed to be the first occasion on which *Nepal* had engaged the enemy. The largest Australian flag was displayed at the foremast and the first round went off with a cheer. We anchored for the night off St Martin's Island at 1930.

Next afternoon the two ships shelled enemy troops at a range of 3,000 yards, near Sitaparokia Hill and, at the request of the army, returned to this area at dusk and during the night carried out two indirect shoots at

suspected enemy positions. "With the aid of starshell we ranged on a convenient rock on the shore and when satisfied with the range shifted to the target area."

The two destroyers took turns to return to Chittagong for fuel, stores and ammunition. On the 16th, which was a quiet day on which the two ships patrolled the coast, Stephenson remarked that "it was most noticeable that the natives, whenever we appeared off one of their villages, came down en masse to the beaches in full view of the ships, bringing with them their belongings and driving their cattle". Various targets were engaged by the ships as required, but there were quiet days with no bombardments. After four such days the bombardments were resumed on 23rd December, when *Nepal* bombarded the enemy supply base of Rathedaung on the Mayu River. To do so she had to anchor as close as possible inshore north of Donbaik, and fire at extreme range over the Mayu River. Spotting was done by an air observer in direct radio telephone communication. That day the 74th Brigade captured Donbaik.

The two destroyers spent Christmas Day at anchor off Cox's Bazar. "The usual customs of the Service were observed and a most enjoyable day was spent." Returning on the 26th they found that Japanese opposition had apparently ceased in the Foul Point area. The ships proceeded some 15 miles up the Naf River, and anchored off the Arakan Coastal Forces Advanced Base at Teknaf, where they remained available in the event of an emergency.

During their support of the 74th Brigade in its advance down the Mayu Peninsula the two destroyers fired 759 rounds with their main armament, in a total of thirteen bombardments. The two H.D.M.L's, which were attached to the destroyers for patrol duties, proved themselves very useful. In them the Bombardment Liaison Officer was able to go close inshore and observe for the ship doing "Direct Bombardment" on villages in advance of the British troops. They were also used for close liaison with brigade headquarters, and a liaison officer went ashore daily in them.

### III

On 26th December the troops of the 25th Division completed the reduction of the Mayu Peninsula and were at Foul Point, looking across the Mayu estuary at the northern shore of Akyab Island. On the 27th it was learned at XV Corps Headquarters that the Japanese were preparing to withdraw from Akyab. It was thereupon decided not to wait until 18th February to assault Akyab as previously planned, but instead to carry out a small landing on the north of the island. Planning for operation LIGHTNING, as the proposed assault was designated, proceeded rapidly.

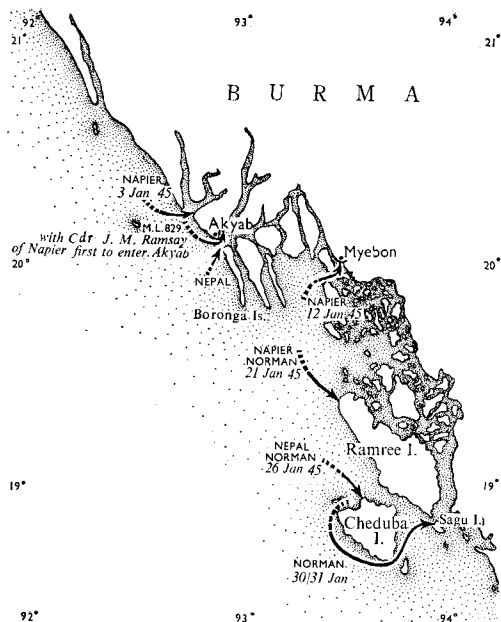
The assault was timed for 3rd January, on a beach north-east of Mayu Point on Akyab Island, and opposite Foul Point. The landing would be carried out by the 3rd Commando Brigade under Brigadier Hardy,<sup>3</sup> R.M.,

<sup>3</sup> General Sir Campbell Hardy, KCB, CBE, DSO; RM. RM Div 1940-43; 46 Cdo RM 1943-44; comd 3 Cdo Bde 1944-45. Comdt General of Royal Marines 1955-59. B. 24 May 1906.

and the landing force would be transported in *Napier* (which would also be Headquarters Ship for the Flag Officer Force W, Rear-Admiral Martin), *Nepal* and H.M.S. *Shoreham*, and two L.C.I's and some M.L's. A number of landing craft concentrated in the Naf River. These would embark the assault troops from the destroyers at a point six miles W.S.W. from Foul Point, and, after the initial landing, ferry the 74th Brigade from Foul Point across the Mayu to Akyab Island. The landing would be covered by a bombardment force of cruisers and destroyers (Force 61) under Rear-Admiral Read. Force 61 sailed from Trincomalee on 30th December and arrived at Chittagong on 1st January.

On 2nd January *Napier* and *Nepal* embarked their troops — 450 and 420 respectively — at Teknaf. At 11.40 a.m., "with an assortment of other craft similarly loaded", they proceeded down river to an anchorage off St Martin's Island, where they were joined by *Shoreham*. That evening Admiral Martin embarked in *Napier* as his headquarters.

At 2 a.m. on the 3rd, Force 61 sailed from Chittagong. The landing craft sailed from St Martin's Island in two convoys at 4.30 and 4.45 respectively, followed by *Napier*, *Nepal* and *Shoreham* at 6.30. During passage to the release position it was learned that the Japanese had withdrawn from Akyab, and Admiral Martin thereupon cancelled the pre-arranged bombardment, and Force 61, less *Phoebe*, returned to Trincomalee. At 9 a.m. the two destroyers and *Shoreham* arrived at the release position, followed within an hour by the two landing craft convoys. These embarked the troops and formed up for the assault, and at 11.15 a.m. the first wave set out. The craft beached at the appointed hour of 12.30, and the troops landed unopposed. As soon as the landing craft had disembarked their commandos, they proceeded to Bungalow Point, near Foul Point on the Mayu Peninsula, where they commenced the embarkation and transportation of the 74th Brigade to Akyab Island. This operation was completed by 4 p.m. on the 4th.



Operations on Burma coast, January 1944

Meanwhile, on 3rd January, the Flotilla Navigating Officer in *Napier*, Lieut-Commander Ramsay,<sup>4</sup> became the first Allied officer to enter Akyab since the British withdrawal from the port on 4th May 1942. After the two destroyers had disembarked their troops into the landing craft, *Napier* proceeded to anchor about two miles off shore, about halfway between Foul Point and Akyab, while *Nepal* patrolled off Akyab Harbour. From her position *Napier*, as Headquarters Ship, was in visual signal touch with craft operating in the Mayu River entrance, and off Akyab Harbour.

At noon Buchanan sent Ramsay in the South African *ML829* to reconnoitre Akyab Harbour entrance and bar, and to check soundings. This was done, and then *ML829* entered the harbour to confirm the report that the Japanese had gone. She was lost to sight from *Nepal* as soon as she passed Savage Island at the harbour's entrance. In his report of the incident, Ramsay wrote:

No sign of life was seen on Fakir Point at the northern side, and so the *ML* was taken right up to the main wharf. This was blocked by two wrecks, and the approaches had silted badly near them, and after two or three unsuccessful attempts to get alongside, it was decided to lower the dinghy and proceed ashore. With Able Seaman Roberts<sup>5</sup> of *Napier*, and one Able Seaman from the *ML*, Lieut-Commander Ramsay pulled in to the steps and, armed with revolvers, proceeded to explore the wharf and nearby buildings. There was no sign of life. Lieut-Commander Ramsay climbed a telegraph pole on the wharf and secured a small Union flag to it and then did a quick reconnaissance of the town, walking about a quarter of a mile round the main block of buildings, in company with the Able Seaman from the *ML*. Able Seaman Roberts was left in the dinghy at the wharf. The town was in a most dilapidated state, with hardly a building intact, and the streets and gardens were almost completely overrun with grass and weeds.

After carrying out a brief survey of the harbour, *ML829* left Akyab and signalled through *Nepal* to Buchanan:

Dan buoys laid on outer bar and Saunders Shoal. Charted soundings confirmed. Union flag flying from telegraph pole on main wharf. Town recco revealed no Japs no commandos no wogs no mines no booby traps. Use of harbour recommended now or immediately after minesweeping.

As *ML829* approached *Nepal* after leaving the harbour, another M.L., carrying Admiral Martin and Buchanan, was sighted. Ramsay transferred to her and returned with them to Akyab to have a quick look around the harbour before returning to *Napier* at sunset. The advanced elements of the assault force reached a damaged bridge across a chaung<sup>6</sup> two or three miles from the town of Akyab at sunset, and camped there for the night. They did not enter the town until the following morning.

<sup>4</sup> Cmdre J. M. Ramsay, DSC; RAN. HMS's *King George V*, *Danae*, *Tapah*; HMAS's *Bungaree*, *Warramunga*, *Napier*, *Australia*. Comd *Warramunga*, Korea, 1952. B. Hobart, 27 Aug 1916.

<sup>5</sup> AB A. H. Roberts, PM7147; HMAS *Napier*. Bank officer; of Melbourne; b. Elsternwick, Vic, 16 Nov 1925. (Name changed by Deed Poll to A. H. Burrows.)

<sup>6</sup> The chaungs, or creeks, are waterways, sometimes many miles in length, varying in width from 10 to 200 yards. The mangrove trees on either side may reach 40 feet in height and the banks, which are covered at high water, are of thick mud. In the very wide creeks there are usually sandbanks in midstream; rocks crop up at unexpected places; and trees growing out of the water frequently rot away, leaving jagged stumps capable of ripping the bottom out of a lightly built launch and damaging the propellers and shafts. At night there is an uncanny stillness, broken only by the cry of birds, the splashing of crocodiles, and the creak of the mangrove roots on the falling tide.

That day, 4th January, *Napier*, *Nepal* and *Shoreham* were joined at Akyab by the R.I.N. sloops *Narbada*<sup>7</sup> and *Jumna*. Also on the 4th Admiral Martin, deciding that the Akyab assault operation was completed, returned to his shore headquarters. Buchanan was left in operational control—pending the arrival of Commander Force 64—of the landing and coastal forces craft employed in the landing on 3rd January. He was also responsible for organising the port of Akyab until the arrival of the Naval Officer-in-Charge, and was charged with the support of the 3rd Commando Brigade in the occupation of the Boronga Islands, just south of Akyab (an operation rendered unnecessary by the withdrawal of the Japanese) and operations in the neighbouring rivers and chaungs.

Meanwhile planning for future operations was in progress, and plans entailed further contributions by the naval forces. One of the two naval tasks was the landing and maintenance of troops at points along the coast to cut off the Japanese retreating south with the object of crossing the Arakan Yomas into the Irrawaddy Valley, there to join the main Japanese army contesting the rapid advance down the valley of General Slim's<sup>8</sup> Fourteenth Army, now approaching Mandalay. The other naval commitment was the capture of Ramree and Cheduba Islands, Ramree being needed as a site for airfields. While planning proceeded, parties from *Napier* carried out repairs to the main wharf, and to the house earmarked as the residence and office of the Naval Officer-in-Charge. *Napier's* officers piloted in all ships of the first convoys to arrive in Akyab.

The Naval Commander Force 64 (Captain Hill,<sup>9</sup> R.N.) and staff, arrived on 7th January to take over operational control of naval craft in the Akyab and Arakan areas, and the duties of N.O.I.C. Akyab. He made his temporary headquarters in *Napier*, and for the next few days Buchanan helped him in planning landing operations at Ponnagyun, on the Kaladan River to the north of Akyab, and a projected assault on Myebon. The Ponnagyun operation, which was carried out successfully on 7th-8th January by *Narbada* and *Jumna* and two M.L.'s, was necessitated by the 53rd Indian Brigade, on the left flank of the advance down the Mayu Peninsula, making contact with enemy forces whose headquarters were in that town.

By 8th January the airfield at Akyab had been sufficiently restored for fighters to be based there, and these dealt decisively with occasional enemy attacks from the air. One such occurred on 9th January when *Nepal*, which had been ordered to Colombo for docking, was alongside *Napier* transferring fuel and stores to that ship. Eight enemy aircraft attacked,

<sup>7</sup> HMIS *Narbada*, sloop (1942), 1,340 tons, six 4-in guns, 18 kts.

<sup>8</sup> Field Marshal Rt Hon Viscount Slim of Yarralumla, KG, GCB, GCMG, GCVO, GBE, DSO, MC. Comd 10 Indian Inf Bde 1939-41; GOC 10 Indian Div 1941-42; comd XV Indian Corps 1942-43. Fourteenth Army 1943-45; C-in-C Allied Land Forces SE Asia 1945-46. Chief of Imperial General Staff 1948-52. Governor-General of Australia 1953-60. Regular soldier; b. Bristol, England, 6 Aug 1891.

<sup>9</sup> Capt D. C. Hill, DSO; RN. HMS's *Royal Arthur*, *Nelson* and *President*; Naval Force Comd Burma 1944-45. B. 10 Apr 1900.

*Nepal* reported: "They did no damage and did not stay long, but five of them were shot down by Spitfires based on the port."

On 10th January it was decided that the assault on Myebon would take place at 8.30 a.m. on 12th January. Naval forces consisted of *Narbada* and *Jumna*, with seven vessels carrying four commando units, together with assault landing craft. H.M.S. *Phoebe* was fighter direction ship. *Napier* was again Headquarters Ship, with Naval Commander Force 64 on board, and on 11th January she embarked the G.O.C. 25th Indian Division, Major-General Wood<sup>1</sup> and his Tactical Headquarters. That day the assault convoy, which had formed up off Akyab, sailed at 5 p.m., escorted by six M.L.'s, with *Narbada* and *Jumna* providing cover. The route was S. by E., and then East to round the southward stretching three fingers of the Borongas, and then N. by E. up into Hunter's Bay which, some twelve miles square, and with Myebon in its north-east corner, lies between East Boronga and the island and chaung-fringed Arakan coast. *Phoebe* and *Napier* sailed during the evening, and the Australian ship anchored in Hunter's Bay about six miles to the southward of Myebon at about 8.30 a.m. on the 12th, just as the assault was developing.

The G.O.C. and Captain Hill went ashore during the morning, and on their return about midday *Napier* proceeded to the vicinity of Akyab to sight the "follow up" convoy leaving that afternoon. She returned to the Myebon area next morning and, it being learned that there was deeper water inshore than had been understood the previous day, she this time went right in to the entrance to Myebon Chaung, and anchored off the assault area with *Narbada* and *Jumna* and the various M.L.'s, minesweepers and landing craft, at 10 a.m. About an hour later the ships were attacked by six fighter-bomber aircraft. The ships suffered no damage, but three enemy aircraft were believed shot down by a combination of ship's gunfire and fighter aircraft directed from *Phoebe*. "One of these," Buchanan reported, "is claimed by H.M.A.S. *Napier*'s pom-pom."

Until p.m. 16th January *Napier* remained at anchor at Myebon as Headquarters Ship of Naval Commander Force 64, and general communications centre. With *Narbada* and *Jumna* she carried out occasional controlled bombardments of targets, but it was found that these interfered with her work as Headquarters Ship, and she withdrew from bombardment duties on the 15th. She sailed from Myebon at 11 p.m. on the 16th, and on the morning of the 18th arrived at Chittagong.

The assault on Myebon was the preliminary to an intricate operation in the maze of chaungs lying off the coast there. Its object was to cut the Japanese supply lines along the inland waterways and the coast road. The naval side of this operation was carried out by sloops of the Royal Indian Navy, M.L.'s, landing craft, and similar vessels. Meanwhile, preparations were well advanced for the largest operation hitherto carried out by the navy in Burma—the capture of Ramree Island.

<sup>1</sup> Maj-Gen G. N. Wood, CB, CBE, DSO, MC. Comd 12 Bn West Yorkshire Regt 1941, 2 Bn Dorset Regt 1941-42, 4 Inf Bde 1942; BGS 33 Indian Corps 1943-44; GOC 25 Indian Div 1944-46. B. 4 May 1898.

## IV

At the beginning of December 1944 H.M.A.S. *Norman* was in Trincomalee. On the 8th, in company with H.M.S. *Paladin*, she screened *Renown* to Durban. The Christmas period was spent in the South African port, and arrangements were made to give three days' leave to each watch—and to accommodate the men. On arrival in Durban it was found, wrote Plunkett-Cole,

that the South African Women's Auxiliary Service (Durban Branch) had the situation well in hand, the two watches of the Ship's Company proceeded on their leave on the due dates without a hitch and all were accommodated to their utmost satisfaction. No praise can be too high for the kindness and the organisation of the South African Women's Auxiliary Service or for the hospitality of the hosts and hostesses concerned.

On 1st January 1945 *Norman* and *Paladin* left Durban and screened H.M.S. *Unicorn* to Colombo; and on the 18th, in company with H.M.S. *Pathfinder*, *Norman* sailed from Trincomalee screening H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth* (wearing the flag of Vice-Admiral Commanding 3rd Battle Squadron) to Akyab for the assault on Ramree Island. The battleship anchored off the Boronga Islands at 3.30 p.m. on 20th January. Here *Napier*, wearing the flag of Admiral Martin, and carrying also Commander XV Corps, General Christison, and Air Officer Commanding 224 Group R.A.F., Air Commodore Lord Bandon,<sup>2</sup> arrived at 4 p.m., and a conference, attended by the destroyer captains, was held in *Queen Elizabeth* to discuss the forthcoming operation.

The object of this operation, MATADOR, was the capture of the northern part of Ramree Island, about 60 miles S.S.E. from Akyab, to pave the way for the development of airfields so that the supply of the Fourteenth Army might be maintained during the monsoon. The assault would be by the 26th Indian Division. A naval force of four personnel ships, two landing ships infantry, two transports and a storeship, 55 landing craft and 20 M.L.'s comprised the assault force. A bombarding force consisted of *Queen Elizabeth*, *Phoebe*, the destroyer H.M.S. *Rapid*,<sup>3</sup> and sloops H.M.S. *Flamingo*<sup>4</sup> and H.M.I.S. *Kistna*,<sup>5</sup> with *Napier* as standby. The destroyer *Norman* and H.M. Ships *Pathfinder* and *Raider* would act as screens to the bombardment force. The sloops and larger ships assembled at Chittagong (Convoy A). *Phoebe*, the destroyers, minesweepers, M.L.'s and landing craft concentrated at Akyab (Convoy B). The two convoys were due at the lowering position, seven miles north-west of the landing beaches at Kyaukpyu, on the north end of Ramree Island, at 7.15 and 7.30 a.m. respectively on 21st January.

During the night 20th-21st January *Napier*, with *Phoebe* and *Rapid*, covered the Chittagong convoy to Ramree Island, which was reached

<sup>2</sup> Air Chief Marshal the Earl of Bandon, GBE, CB, CVO, DSO; RAF. Comd 82 Sqn 1939-40, RAF Stn West Raynham 1941-42; AOC 224 Gp SEA 1945. B. 30 Aug 1904.

<sup>3</sup> HMS *Rapid*, destroyer (1942), 1,705 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>4</sup> HMS *Flamingo*, sloop (1939), 1,250 tons, six 4-in AA guns, 19½ kts.

<sup>5</sup> HMIS *Kistna*, sloop (1942), 1,375 tons, six 4-in AA guns, 20 kts.



at dawn. Before the assault at 9.30 a.m., *Kistna*, *Flamingo*, *Rapid*, *Pathfinder* and *Phoebe* went close inshore off Kyaukpyu, and carried out a direct bombardment of the Japanese defences. *Napier* engaged gun positions on Georgina Point—to the west of Kyaukpyu—and the adjacent beach, and fired a total of 87 rounds. About 60 Liberator aircraft and a similar number of Thunderbolt P.47 fighter aircraft bombed and strafed the defences. “*Queen Elizabeth*,” recorded Buchanan in his report, “also bombarded with spectacular effect shortly before 9.30 when the assault commenced.”

A few desultory shots were fired by the shore defences, but none fell near the warships, and the Japanese gunfire never developed into a menace. One landing craft and one M.L. were destroyed by mines. During the operation *Napier* acted as headquarters ship until 2 p.m., when Admiral Martin and the army and air force commanders transferred to *Pathfinder* and *Napier* sailed to join *Queen Elizabeth*. On the way out from the inshore area *Napier* met *Norman*, which had been screening the aircraft carrier H.M.S. *Ameer*, on her way in, and the orders and charts for MATADOR were transferred to her from *Napier*. By the end of the day 7,000 troops had been put ashore, as well as 121 vehicles and 70 tons of stores. Ashore the troops met with little resistance and advanced as rapidly as the nature of the country permitted.

*Norman* stood by on call for bombardments off Dalhousie Point, Kyaukpyu, until 11 a.m. on the 23rd when—not being called upon for bombardment—she sailed for Akyab, where she arrived that afternoon. Meanwhile *Napier*, with the sloop H.M.S. *Redpole*,<sup>6</sup> screened *Queen Elizabeth* on passage to Trincomalee, which was reached in the forenoon of the 24th. The Australian destroyer sailed that afternoon for Colombo, where, from the 25th until the end of the month she was refitting in dry dock. She did not return to Burma.

At about the time that *Norman*, at 11 a.m. on 23rd January, sailed from Kyaukpyu for Akyab, *Nepal*, wearing the flag of the Commander-in-Chief East Indies, Admiral Power, sailed from Trincomalee for the Arakan Coast, where Admiral Power wished “to witness certain operations and inspect the naval ‘set-ups’.”<sup>7</sup> The “certain operations” included operation SANKEY, the occupation of Cheduba Island, immediately south of Ramree, which was to be an entirely naval operation. It was to take part in this that *Norman*, on 24th January, sailed from Akyab in company with the destroyer *Raider* and frigates *Spey* and *Teviot*<sup>8</sup> and, with the aircraft carrier *Ameer*, joined Force 65—Rear-Admiral Read in *Newcastle* from Trincomalee with *Nigeria*, *Kenya* and *Paladin*.

Plans for the operations were for a landing to be carried out by a force of 500 marines from the East Indies Fleet, who would establish a bridge-head so that a follow up battalion of the 36th Brigade could land without

<sup>6</sup> HMS *Redpole*, sloop (1943), 1,375 tons, six 4-in AA guns, 20 kts.

<sup>7</sup> *Nepal* “Letter of Proceedings” for month of January 1945.

<sup>8</sup> HMS’s *Spey* and *Teviot* (1941-42), 1,325 tons, two or three 4-in AA guns, 20 kts.

the necessity of mounting an assault. The marines would be carried to the assault area from Trincomalee in *Newcastle*, *Kenya* and *Nigeria*. The three cruisers and destroyers *Norman*, *Rapid*, *Paladin* and *Raider* would support the landing with gunfire. *Ameer* would provide fighter cover and *Phoebe* would be the fighter direction ship. The landing would be made at 8.45 a.m. on 26th January at Searle Point beach, northernmost point of Cheduba Island, six-and-a-half miles across Cheduba Strait from Ramree Island. The operation was entirely successful and went according to plan excepting that the follow-up battalion, which should have arrived on 27th January to relieve the marines did not arrive until 30th January, owing to a misunderstanding due to excessive use of code words. The marines then handed over a Cheduba completely free of the enemy.

The cruisers and destroyers arrived at the disembarkation area, seven miles north-west of the landing beach, at 6.45 a.m. *Nepal* arrived about 7.30; assault craft went alongside the troop-carrying cruisers, embarked the marines, and the first wave started for the beach at 7.45 a.m., with the second following ten minutes later. *Nepal*'s role was solely that of observer. As Stephenson recorded: "The Commander-in-Chief in *Nepal* viewed the operation from the vicinity of the bombarding destroyers, but we took no active part." *Norman*, however, did so, and Plunkett-Cole recorded that:

At 0800 26th January (observed as Australia Day in the Commonwealth) HMAS *Norman*, together with all destroyers and the three cruisers, opened fire on the targets ordered. HMAS *Norman* fired on the landing beach to the westward of Searle Point and fire appeared to be effective.

Of the 1,073 rounds fired by the three cruisers and two destroyers (*Raider* and *Norman*), *Norman*'s contribution was 214.

The first wave of assault craft reached the beach at 8.48. The marines landed without opposition and quickly occupied the beach-head. The destroyers stood by throughout 27th, 28th and 29th January, but the days were uneventful for them, and no calls for fire were received. On the 30th *Norman*, in company with *Raider*, took part in operation CROCODILE, the landing of a force on Sagu Island, just off the southern tip of Ramree. In the course of this operation, which was successfully carried out, the two destroyers, on the morning of the 30th, bombarded Japanese gun positions on the southern tip of Ramree. On the 31st *Norman* proceeded through The Gates—the narrow passage between Ramree and Sagu Islands—and covered the landing, by four landing craft, of 120 troops on the eastern side of Ramree's tip, and carried out a pre-landing bombardment with 4.7-inch and pom-pom fire.

The landing was unopposed and soon after it was effected a message was received from the shore "that villagers report no Japanese or guns anywhere in these parts". This, remarked Plunkett-Cole in his report, "made us feel a little sheepish". By this time the destroyers were no longer required, and at 6 p.m. on the 31st *Norman* and *Raider* ceased to be part of Force 65 and came under the orders of Admiral Martin.

*Nepal* was the last of the Australian destroyers actively employed with the naval forces in the Burma campaign. After observing the Cheduba operation she took the Commander-in-Chief on a tour of the Arakan operational areas, and then transferred the Flag to *Rapid* at Chittagong on 29th January. She then came under Admiral Martin's orders, and at 2 a.m. on 2nd February carried out a bombardment of enemy positions on the southern end of Ramree Island. At dawn that day she went through The Gates for another bombardment of enemy concentrations near the village of Kyauknimaw, on the Ramree shore of the Kaleindaung River estuary. Army patrols on shore found a deserted 25-pounder gun and ammunition in this target area next day. *Nepal* carried out another bombardment in the area on 3rd February, and on the 4th, with *Pathfinder*, covered the landing of some 900 troops at Kyauknimaw, "without incident".

Later that day, with *Pathfinder* and four M.L's under his orders, Stephenson proceeded up the Kaleindaung River some fifteen miles from Ramree's southern tip to Ramree Chaung, to provide gunfire support for the army's attack from the north-west on the town of Ramree on the chaung of that name, and also to prevent Japanese troops from withdrawing from Ramree and escaping across the river at night. Just after 7 a.m. next day, the 5th, *Nepal* was turning in the river when she struck an uncharted obstruction and damaged the starboard propeller. Time was now approaching when the 7th Destroyer Flotilla must join the British Pacific Fleet, and in the evening of the 12th *Nepal* sailed from Kyaukpyu for Colombo, where she arrived on the 16th and entered dry dock.

The three Australian destroyers had played a not unimportant part in naval operations on the Arakan coast, without which the army would have been hard put to it to have advanced beyond Akyab. By early April the naval task was completed, and almost all naval forces were withdrawn from the Arakan coast in preparation for the assault on Rangoon. There were thus no naval forces present when the reconquest of Arakan was completed with the occupation of Gwa—midway between Cheduba Island and Pagoda Point at Arakan's southern extremity—by the West Africans on 15th May. But it was the navy's contribution which made that reconquest possible.

## V

Ironically H.M.A.S. *Nizam*, the only destroyer of the 7th Flotilla not in action against the enemy at this period, was the only one to suffer casualties. During November and December 1944 and January 1945 *Nizam* was refitting in Williamstown Dockyard. During that period Commander Brooks, who had been in command since January 1943, was succeeded by Lieut-Commander Cook, and on 9th February *Nizam* sailed from Port Phillip for Fremantle on her way to rejoin the Eastern Fleet. On the night of the 11th she was off Cape Leeuwin. The weather was moderate, with a slight wind and moderate sea. At 10.11 p.m. course was

altered from N.W. by W. to North, rounding the Cape. As Cook later stated in his report of the incident:

The captain conned the ship round, using the minimum amount of wheel necessary. Speed was maintained at  $21\frac{1}{2}$  knots. Although readings recorded at 2000 were: wind S.E., Force 3, Sea 22, the roll on course 306 was not excessive, and no violent motion was felt as course was altered, or for several minutes after. At approximately 2215, however, a heavy squall hit the ship. The wind increased greatly in force, and almost simultaneously what can only be described as a freak wave struck the ship on the starboard side. The Quartermaster states that at this moment the wheel was amidships, but as she rolled she swung to starboard, and as the helmsman lost his balance no compensating wheel was put on.

The extent of the roll was not measured, but damage done to the fittings showed that it was "very considerable". Ratings were hurled or washed overboard from "B" gundeck, the port signalling projector platform, P1 Oerlikon gun platform, and the upper deck; and owing to the enforced delay in getting under way and restoring power to the signalling projectors, valuable time was unavoidably lost in commencing an attempt at rescue work.

By this time the wind was at near gale force, and the sea and spray made it difficult to see further than twenty yards from the ship, even with the aid of the lights available. As well as she was able the ship was manoeuvred in circles round the position where it was judged the men had been washed overboard, but no sign of any survivors was seen.

After about an hour it became imperative to put the ship on a safe course to clear the dangers of the Leeuwin; this was done, and *Nizam* arrived at Fremantle at 3 p.m. on the 12th. Ten of her company were lost<sup>9</sup> in this example of the perils of the sea as distinct from those of naval warfare.

In December and January, in addition to the close support of the army in Burma, the East Indies Fleet had two other main objects: the denial of the Indian Ocean to the Japanese, and the destruction of the enemy war potential, especially oil; and of shipping, and shore installations. Strong naval forces were available to implement plans for the attainment of these objects, since several ships of the newly-formed British Pacific Fleet were on the East Indies Station and could augment the reconstituted East Indies Fleet. It was decided to use the British Pacific Fleet, during part of its working-up period, to augment the East Indies Fleet in a series of attacks on Japanese oil installations on Sumatra. These were carried out with success on 20th December at Belawan Deli; on 4th January at Pankalan Brandan; and on 24th January and 29th January at Palembang.

In each instance the attack was carried out under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Vian, Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers, British Pacific Fleet, flying his flag in *Indomitable*, with one or more other carriers,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>9</sup> OD J. S. W. Barnett, B5081; OD G. J. Hill, H2725; OD L. A. Holloway, PA4696; AB A. G. Kerr, S8275; AB V. C. J. Keys, S7606; AB A. W. Milich, PA2184; OD K. J. Mills, PA4702; Stoker J. Poulton, PA4871; AB V. G. Richardson, PM4069; Ldg Seaman C. S. Ryder, W1225.

<sup>1</sup> The accompanying carriers in the four raids were: Belawan Deli—*Illustrious*; Pankalan Brandan—*Victorious*, *Indefatigable*; Palembang—*Illustrious*, *Victorious*, *Indefatigable*.

and cruisers and destroyers. Considerable damage was done to oil installations, and as a result of the Palembang raids production was halted for a while; at the end of March, both the Pladju and Sungei Gerong refineries were down to one-third capacity production, which had improved to no more than half capacity by the end of May.

## VI

The British Pacific Fleet was formed on 22nd November 1944 and on 11th December, as stated above, H.M.S. *Howe*, Admiral Fraser's flagship, arrived in Fremantle on her way to Sydney. On 15th January Admiral Fraser, who had arrived in Sydney the previous day from a conference at Pearl Harbour with Admiral Nimitz, signalled to Admiral King at Washington:

I hereby report for duty in accordance with the "Octagon" decisions. The British Fleet will look forward to fighting alongside the U.S. Navy in whatever area you may assign us.

Next day Admiral King replied with a message of welcome, and advice that allocations to meet operational requirements of MacArthur and Nimitz would continue to be made by him—King—in consonance with the OCTAGON Conference decisions, and in the same manner as was done by him in his capacity as executive agent of the U.S. Chiefs of Staff with respect to the U.S. Fleet.

On 19th January H.M. Ships *Howe* and *Swiftsure*<sup>2</sup> and three destroyers arrived at Manus from Sydney. An intermediate base had been established in the Admiralty Islands for use by escort forces and as a staging point on the supply route from Australia. The main base of the British Pacific Fleet was at Sydney, with minor bases at Brisbane, Cairns, Adelaide, Melbourne and Fremantle. Administration of the fleet was from Melbourne where Vice-Admiral Daniel had his headquarters as Vice-Admiral (Administration) British Pacific Fleet.

On 26th January Admiral Fraser supplied a nominal list of the British Pacific Fleet, showing that it then included 95 ships and vessels of all kinds. Of these, 27 were in Task Force 113, which included *King George V*, *Howe*; *Illustrious*, *Victorious*, *Indomitable*, *Indefatigable*;<sup>3</sup> the cruisers *Swiftsure*, *Gambia* (New Zealand), *Black Prince*,<sup>4</sup> *Argonaut*, and *Euryalus*;<sup>5</sup> and 16 destroyers of the 4th Flotilla (which included H.M.A. Ships *Quickmatch* and *Quiberon*) and the 25th and 27th Flotillas.

Included in the 24 escorts in the Support Forces were sixteen ships of the R.A.N. in the 21st and 22nd Minesweeping Flotillas. The 21st Flotilla (constituted as from 1st December 1944) comprised H.M.A. Ships *Ballarat* (Commander Morris, S.O.), *Maryborough*, *Lismore*, *Whyalla*,

<sup>2</sup> HMS *Swiftsure*, cruiser (1943), 8,000 tons, nine 6-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 31½ kts.

<sup>3</sup> HMS *Indefatigable*, aircraft carrier (1944), 23,000 tons, sixteen 4.5-in DP guns, 70 aircraft, 32 kts.

<sup>4</sup> HMS *Black Prince*, cruiser (1942), 5,770 tons, eight 5.25-in DP guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

<sup>5</sup> HMS *Euryalus*, cruiser (1939), 5,450 tons, ten 5.25-in DP guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

*Goulburn*, *Kalgoorlie*, *Toowoomba* and *Bendigo*. The 22nd Flotilla, constituted as from 24th November 1944, comprised H.M.A. Ships *Geraldton* (Commander Walton, S.O.<sup>6</sup>), *Cessnock* (Lieutenant Sweetman<sup>7</sup>), *Cairns* (Lieutenant Weber), *Ipswich* (Lieutenant Creasey), *Tamworth* (Lieutenant Lloyd-Jones<sup>8</sup>), *Wollongong* (Lieutenant Hare<sup>9</sup>), *Pirie* (Commander Travis), and *Launceston* (Lieut-Commander Barron).

As constituted, the 21st and 22nd Minesweeping Flotillas each consisted of nine ships, and included respectively H.M.A. Ships *Burnie* and *Gawler* in addition to those listed above. But, presumably since these two ships were for the first two months of 1945 refitting in Australia, they were not included in Admiral Fraser's nominal list of the British Pacific Fleet on 26th January.

The remaining 44 ships of the 95 listed by Admiral Fraser were those in Task Force 112, the Fleet Train. Commanded by Rear-Admiral Fisher<sup>1</sup> as Flag Officer Fleet Train, TF.112 comprised various types of ships from ferry carriers to tugs, and repair ships to oilers. It was something new in British naval operations. Hitherto, since the advent of steam, a British fleet had been accustomed to return to a shore base for replenishment of stores and ammunition. But the fighting area was 4,000 miles from Sydney, the main base of the British Pacific Fleet; and such distances had led the Americans to develop a new naval concept, that of the Fleet Train designed to enable ships to keep the sea for periods comparable to those of sailing ship days, under conditions of ceaseless expenditure of fuel, ammunition and supplies of every description. This concept the Admiralty now adopted, faced as it was with the implications of operating a British fleet in the Pacific with its great distances from bases. The problem of logistics was one examined by Admiral Daniel early in 1944, when he took a naval mission to the United States for consultations regarding the British Pacific Fleet. A great difficulty was the collection of ships for the Fleet Train, the principle of which was the assembly at advanced anchorages of ocean-going shipping equipped to support the fleet logistically during operations against the enemy. This called for the inclusion in the Fleet Train of repair ships, store ships, freighters, amenity ships, harbour service craft, accommodation ships and hospital ships, among others.

In the nominal list of 26th January a good start was made with a Fleet Train in the 44 ships of TF.112. Within a couple of months that number of ships in the Fleet Train was to be almost doubled, and was to include the four destroyers of the 7th Flotilla. These ships, which when Admiral

<sup>6</sup> Capt J. K. Walton, OBE; RAN. HMAS's *Perth*, *Canberra*, *Hobart*; comd HMAS *Geraldton* and SO 22 MS Flotilla 1944-45, comd HMAS *Quickmatch* 1945. Of Darlington, WA; b. Mt Magnet, WA, 29 Jun 1905.

<sup>7</sup> Lt-Cdr E. J. T. Sweetman, RANR. HMAS *Perth*; comd HMAS *Cessnock* 1943-44. B. 16 Mar 1916.

<sup>8</sup> Lt D. B. Lloyd-Jones, RANR. HMAS *Echuca*; comd HMAS *Tamworth* 1944-45. Merchant service; b. Wales, 22 Nov 1910.

<sup>9</sup> Lt-Cdr J. W. Hare, RANR. HMAS's *Mildura* and *Swan*; comd HMAS *Wollongong* 1944-45. Merchant service; b. South Shields, England, 21 Sep 1897.

<sup>1</sup> Admiral Sir Douglas Fisher, KCB, KBE; RN. Comd HMS *Warspite* 1940-42; Rear Adm Fleet Train, British Pacific Fleet 1944-45; Flag Officer Western Area, British Pacific Fleet 1945. B. 23 Oct 1890.

Fraser issued his nominal list were still included in the East Indies Fleet, were now about to concentrate in Sydney to join the British Pacific Fleet.

From 13th February to 7th March, *Nizam* was in Fremantle. She left that port in the morning of 7th March, and on the 14th entered Sydney Harbour. Two days later *Norman* and *Nepal*, which left Trincomalee in company with the British Pacific Fleet escort carriers *Ruler* and *Fencer*,<sup>2</sup> arrived in Sydney. *Napier* was the first of the flotilla to leave Western Australia for Sydney but the last to arrive at that port, since she spent some days in Port Phillip refitting and making good damage suffered on passage from Fremantle.

In the evening of 23rd February *Napier* in company with H.M.S. *Formidable* and the destroyer H.M.S. *Urchin*<sup>3</sup> left Trincomalee for Fremantle after the three ships had exercised together for some days in the Ceylon area.

In the afternoon of the 28th the ships received signalled advice that *Activity* had that day picked up survivors from *Peter Sylvester*, and *Formidable* was ordered by the Commander-in-Chief to carry out an air search for further survivors. A search by seven Avenger aircraft from the carrier was carried out on 1st March and again on the 2nd, but without success. Fremantle was reached on 3rd March, and after fuelling and replenishing supplies the three ships sailed for Sydney at 9 o'clock next morning.

For the first three or four days of the passage the weather was good and the voyage uneventful. But then *Napier* suffered an experience similar—though in a lesser degree—to that of *Nizam* off the Leeuwin. On 7th March a strong south-westerly was blowing, and the destroyers found this and a large quartering sea rather uncomfortable. Buchanan's Report of Proceedings takes up the story:

At 1145 the next day, in sight of King Island [in Bass Strait, S.S.E. of Cape Otway] and to the westward, *Napier* gave a large roll to port, shipped a sea, and lost two men (Able Seaman L. J. Halpin,<sup>4</sup> and Able Seaman R. F. Back<sup>5</sup>) overboard. At the time of the roll, these men were sitting inboard near the funnel and in the vicinity of the Jolly Boat. . . . During the roll the Jolly Boat was smashed beyond repair and the splinter-proof shield from "X" gun deck guard rails was torn off. An immediate search was commenced and, although a thorough search of the area was carried out until dusk, the men were not seen, although wreckage and lifebuoys were frequently sighted. The search was reluctantly abandoned at dusk and, as a rendezvous with *Formidable* could not be effected due to the weather and lack of fuel, course was set for Port Melbourne.

*Napier* was in dockyard hands at Melbourne from 10th to 27th March. On the 29th she sailed for Sydney, where she arrived at noon on the 30th. On 1st April, in company with *Norman* and *Nizam*, she sailed for Manus. *Nepal* followed independently next day.

<sup>2</sup> HMS's *Ruler* and *Fencer*, escort carriers (1942-43), 11,000-11,420 tons, two 5-in DP guns, 20 aircraft, 16 kts.

<sup>3</sup> HMS *Urchin*, destroyer (1943), 1,710 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>4</sup> AB L. J. Halpin, F4350. HMAS's *Mercedes* and *Napier*. B. Geraldton, WA, 21 Jan 1918. Lost at sea 8 Mar 1945.

<sup>5</sup> AB R. F. Back, S6403. HMAS's *Deloraine* and *Napier*. B. Sydney, 5 Jun 1922. Lost at sea 8 Mar 1945.

## CHAPTER 21

### LINGAYEN GULF

AS stated earlier in this volume, on 15th September 1944 the Halsey-Nimitz-MacArthur agreement that the proposed Yap, Talaud Islands and Mindanao landings be cancelled and the date of the assault on Leyte be advanced from 20th December to 20th October, was accepted by the OCTAGON Conference at Quebec. The question of the subsequent target, Luzon or Formosa, still remained unresolved. Admiral King strongly favoured the taking of Formosa, with telling arguments to support his concept: among them that it would sever Japanese communications with her conquests of 1942, would be a step nearer Japan than would be Luzon, would continue the successful "Leapfrog" strategy. But there were more cogent arguments against: MacArthur's that the United States was in honour bound to liberate the Philippines, and his offer to free Luzon two months after Leyte with the troops to be employed in this last-named; and the apprehension that casualties in an attack on Formosa might reach a prohibitive figure. Most forceful consideration was that the American Army would not be able to provide the necessary forces for the Formosa attack until three months after Germany had surrendered. At an informal conference in San Francisco at the end of September between Nimitz and Sherman, the Senior Army and Air Force Commanders in Nimitz's Pacific Ocean areas and Admiral King, the Admiral was persuaded that Luzon, not Formosa, should be next on the list.

As a result, on 3rd October 1944, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued "their last important strategic directive of the war".<sup>1</sup> Its main provisions were: MacArthur to invade Luzon on 20th December; and Nimitz to invade one or more islands of the Bonins-Volcano group on 20th January 1945, and one or more in the Ryukyus on 1st March.

In the event the above dates were not kept. Planning for the Luzon landings was under way before the assault on Leyte, as was the issue of MacArthur's operational instructions, on 12th and 13th October, for the Mindoro landings on 5th December and for Lingayen Gulf on the 20th. The land operations were assigned to General Krueger's Sixth Army, and the accompanying naval tasks to Admiral Kinkaid's Seventh Fleet. MacArthur was firm about the projected dates, but the air situation troubled Kinkaid, and his views were supported by Generals Sutherland and Kenney, and Admirals Nimitz and Halsey. The existing plans for Mindoro and Lingayen assumed that by 5th December—the target date for Mindoro—the American Air Force on Leyte would have control of the air over that island and the central Visayas. But the Japanese reacted strongly, and indications were that American air power could not be on top by 5th

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<sup>1</sup> S. E. Morison, *The Liberation of the Philippines* (1959), p. 5, Vol XIII in the series.



December; and in the circumstances, though reluctantly, MacArthur, towards the end of November, agreed to postpone the Mindoro action to 15th December—as mentioned earlier in this volume. The date of the Lingayen landings was put back from 20th December to 9th January 1945.

Luzon, largest and most important of the Philippine Islands with an area of 40,422 square miles—little less than half that of the State of Victoria—harbours the capital city of Manila, standing on one of the world's largest land-locked harbours. The island had a population of 7,355,000 before the war. Apart from a central plain, almost the whole of Luzon is mountainous and heavily forested. The two main entrances to the plain from the sea are at Manila Bay in the south and Lingayen Gulf, a deep indentation reaching south to some 100 miles N.N.W. of the capital. Manila Bay was strongly defended at Corregidor Island, in the entrance. Lingayen was undefended, and from it good roads and a railway ran to Manila. It was decided to make the landings in Lingayen Gulf which, rectangular in form, is about 20 miles wide and 30 miles long, exposed to the north-west and with capacious anchorage area at the inner end, bordered by gradually shelving sandy beaches. The object of the proposed operation was stated as being the prompt seizure of the central Luzon area, destruction of the principal defence forces, denial to the Japanese of the northern entrance to the South China Sea, and the provision of bases for the support of further operations against the Japanese.

Kinkaid, Barbey and Wilkinson—the last two commanding the assault convoys—were concerned about the exposure of the attacking expedition to air and surface assault en route to an objective beyond ready coverage from existing bases. In the light of Leyte experience it was believed probable that the Japanese might risk part of their fleet in hit-and-run attacks by fast surface forces on the transport groups. The fleet could still muster a formidable force of some 4 battleships, 4 fleet carriers, 2 light and one escort carriers, 4 heavy and 5 light cruisers, 35 destroyers and 54 submarines. These were mainly disposed in the Empire-Kuriles-Formosa area. Though the Japanese air forces in the Philippines had been dealt heavy blows, their power was not neutralised. There were more than 70 operational airfields in the Philippines area from which military aircraft could be operated, and estimated enemy shore-based aircraft immediately available in the area at 4th January 1945 were 508 fighters, 332 bombers and 208 other types. These numbers could be augmented by staging aircraft from Formosa, Hainan, China and the Netherlands East Indies. It was expected that with the forces immediately available the Japanese could make daily strikes against the assault forces on their way to Lingayen Gulf, with 100 fighters and 50 bombers. And it was estimated that from the Empire probably 300 fighters and 150 bombers could be staged through Formosa and be available for the defence of Luzon within four to seven days of the Allied landing.

Having regard to this potential enemy opposition, the naval commanders discussed with MacArthur's staff the possibility of landing on southern

or eastern Luzon. But, because of its terrain, Lingayen emerged as the only suitable point for a major attack on the island. A choice from three routes to Lingayen engaged the consideration of the planners—north of Luzon, through San Bernardino Strait, and through Surigao Strait. This last was farthest from unsubdued Luzon aerodromes; it avoided exposure to adverse weather conditions; it passed almost all the way through waters too deep for mining; and it afforded land-based air cover for convoys. It was therefore recommended to, and accepted by, MacArthur.

Planning for the Luzon operation was done in Hollandia. The naval command status was Vice-Admiral Kinkaid, Commander Seventh Fleet, in control of amphibious operations as CTF.77, Commander Luzon Attack Force; Vice-Admiral Wilkinson, Commander III Amphibious Force, CTF.79, Commander Lingayen Attack Force; Vice-Admiral Barbey, Commander VII Amphibious Force, CTF.78, Commander San Fabian Attack Force. Vice-Admiral Oldendorf commanded the Bombardment and Fire Support Group; Rear-Admiral Berkey the Close Covering Group; Rear-Admiral C. T. Durgin the Escort Carrier Group; and Rear-Admiral Conolly the Reinforcement Group.

In support of the operation the Pacific Fleet was assigned the task of destroying any enemy forces threatening interference, and of preventing reinforcement of air units in Formosa. Third Fleet task groups under Admiral Halsey were disposed in the air north-east of Luzon to cover the operation, and conducted air strikes against Formosa, Okinawa and northern Luzon. Submarines of the Seventh and Pacific Fleets were disposed to intercept and give warning of any approaching hostile surface forces. American air forces based on China, and operating from the Marianas, supported the operation by strikes on Japanese objectives within range, and by scouting missions. And the Far East Air Force, operating from Leyte, Mindoro and Morotai, attacked Japanese communications and airfields in the Philippines and provided fighter cover for the assault convoys.

The beaches selected for the Lingayen Gulf landings were spaced along the south and south-east shores of the gulf, one group in the vicinity of the town of Lingayen, and the other—some ten miles to the north-east—on both sides of the town of San Fabian. At Lingayen the landings were to be made by the 37th and 40th Divisions of the Sixth Army; those at San Fabian by the 6th and 43rd Divisions. The troops of the 37th Division had to be transported from Bougainville where—as stated earlier—they had been relieved by the Australians. Those of the 40th Division were to be carried from New Britain, and the 6th and 43rd Divisions from New Guinea.

## II

On 15th December the roadstead at Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville, was crowded with loaded and troop-laden transports. The eighteen ships of Transport Squadron 13 included *Mount Olympus* (7,234 tons), Flagship of Vice-Admiral Wilkinson, commanding the Lingayen Attack

Force, TF.79, and H.M.A. Ships *Manoora* (Commander Cousin, Senior Naval Officer Australian Landing Ships), *Kanimbla* (Commander Bunyan) and *Westralia* (Lieut-Commander Livingston).<sup>2</sup> The three Australian ships arrived at Torokina on 30th November, after having taken part during that month in the transport of troops from Humboldt Bay to Leyte. (The three Australian L.S.I's left Humboldt Bay on 9th November in company with Transport Divisions 8 and 24. During passage, on 12th November, Transport Division 6 joined up, and the convoy, now consisting of 26 transports and their escorts, arrived at Leyte on 14th November.) They were back in Humboldt Bay on 19th November and proceeded thence at intervals, and by stages, to Torokina. Here, in company with other transports, they embarked troops<sup>3</sup> and gear, and on 16th December the convoy of 18 ships of Transport Group A (under the command of Rear-Admiral I. N. Kiland in *Mount McKinley*<sup>4</sup>) of Admiral Wilkinson's TF.79, escorted by six U.S. destroyers, sailed for Manus via Lae. At Lae they were joined by Rear-Admiral Royal's Transport Group B, with the 40th Division, from Cape Gloucester. On a beach between Lae and Salamaua, ships and troops rehearsed the Lingayen landing before proceeding on to Manus, where they arrived on 21st December.

In the morning of 31st December they left Manus, as Cousin recorded in *Manoora*'s report, "with six destroyer escorts en route to execute assault Mike I in Lingayen Gulf on Luzon Island". Meanwhile other troop movements were under way, with Lingayen Gulf as their objective. Admiral Barbey's TF.78, the San Fabian Attack Force, embarked troops of the 6th and 43rd Infantry Divisions at Sansapor and Aitape—where the force kept Christmas—and were on their way to Luzon before the end of the year. The Luzon Attack Force Reserve embarked at Noumea, New Caledonia, and sailed from Purvis Bay on Christmas Day for Manus. There were other embarkations in New Guinea and, in all, "the troops for the Lingayen landing were lifted from sixteen different bases in the South and South-West Pacific, all but one of which—Noumea—the Allies had wrested from the Japanese".<sup>5</sup>

On 31st December, when Cousin recorded in *Manoora*'s report the departure of Transport Group A from Manus "to execute assault attack

<sup>2</sup> Cdr E. W. Livingston, DSC, RD; RANR. Comd HMAS's *Bingera* 1939-40, *Wyrallah* 1940-42, *Wilcannia* 1942-44, *Westralia* 1944-45. Master mariner; of Sydney; b. Balmain, NSW, 27 Jan 1903.

Livingston succeeded Knight in command of *Westralia* while the ship was in Humboldt Bay on 30th October. Recording that fact in his October "Letter of Proceedings", Knight wrote: "During the period of my command of HMAS *Westralia* in commission as an LSI, namely seventeen months, 1,259 officers and 20,025 other ranks have been trained in this ship in amphibious warfare. 1,048 officers and 18,460 men were transported in and to the forward areas, with 30,829 tons of military equipment (including vehicles) handled mostly by the ship's landing craft. *Westralia* has taken part in important landings against the enemy at Arawe, Hollandia, and Panaon. . . . As the Commanding Officer with the longest service in an Australian LSI under the operational orders of Commander TF76, I would like to make mention of the many considerations shown *Westralia*, and facilities afforded in the forward areas by Rear-Admiral Barbey's staff. Our needs have always been a priority consideration, and serving under this Command has been a happy experience."

<sup>3</sup> The three Australian ships embarked a total of 191 officers and 3,032 enlisted men of the 37th Division: *Manoora*, 55 officers and 958 men; *Kanimbla*, 83 officers and 1,247 men; and *Westralia*, 53 officers and 827 men.

<sup>4</sup> *Mount McKinley*, US amphibious force command ship (1944), 7,234 tons.

<sup>5</sup> Morison, Vol XIII, p. 97.

Mike I in Lingayen Gulf", Alliston, in *Warramunga*, wrote: "*Warramunga* sailed for Leyte and operation Mike I in company with TG.74.1, and US ships *Sands*, *Clemson*<sup>6</sup> and *Dickerson*."<sup>7</sup> Their point of departure on this occasion was, however, Kossol Roads in the Palau Islands, and not Manus. TG.74.1 (Commodore Farncomb in *Australia*, with *Shropshire*, *Arunta* and *Warramunga*) had left Seeadler Harbour five days before, on 26th December, and spent three days at Kossol Roads before sailing for Leyte on their way to Luzon. Leyte was reached at 7 a.m. on 1st January 1945, and the Task Group anchored in San Pedro Bay. Another Australian arrival there on that morning was *Warrego* (Lieutenant Byrne<sup>8</sup>) fresh from Sydney and a refit at Garden Island. She had on board Commander Oom as Commander Task Group 70.5, and joined forces with *Gascoyne*, which had arrived at San Pedro Bay the previous day after her busy Christmas Day at Guiuan Harbour. After a conference with Commander Loud, CTG.77.6, the Minesweeping and Hydrographic Group, it was decided that *Warrego* would accompany *Gascoyne* in that group to Lingayen Gulf.

### III

At noon on this day, 1st January, the sea road between the Philippines and the Admiralty Islands was heavy with widely dispersed traffic comprising some 650 ships, landing craft, miscellaneous small craft, and escort forces, making up towards their objective at Luzon.<sup>9</sup> The armada was disposed in four distinct groups. First the Minesweeping and Hydrographic Group, TG.77.6, plus L.C.I's, oilers, ammunition ships, salvage tugs and screen. It included H.M.A. Ships *Gascoyne* and *Warrego*, and was the first to leave Leyte—on 2nd January. Second Group was that of Oldendorf's Bombardment and Fire Support Group, TG.77.2 of six battleships 12 escort carriers, eight cruisers, 46 destroyers, and smaller craft—and including H.M.A. Ships *Shropshire*, *Australia*, *Arunta* and *Warramunga*. TG.77.2 sortied from Leyte on 3rd January and at 6.30 a.m., when at the northern entrance to Surigao Strait, was some 150 miles astern of TG.77.6, which it was due to overtake at dawn on 5th January off Manila Bay. TG.77.2 was in two circular divisions, separated by about ten miles. The Lingayen Fire Support Unit, plus six escort carriers, and including *Shropshire*, *Arunta*, and *Warramunga*, was in the van, and the San Fabian Fire Support Unit, plus six escort carriers and including *Australia*, in the rear.

The third, and much the largest group, left Leyte Gulf in the evening of 4th January. It extended for more than 40 miles from van to rear, and was led by Berkey's Close Covering Group, TG.77.3—with MacArthur embarked in *Boise*—Barbey's San Fabian Attack Force, TF.78; two

<sup>6</sup> *Clemson*, US high speed transport (converted 1940), 1,190 tons.

<sup>7</sup> *Dickerson*, US high speed transport (1919—later converted), 1,060 tons, four 4-in or six 3-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

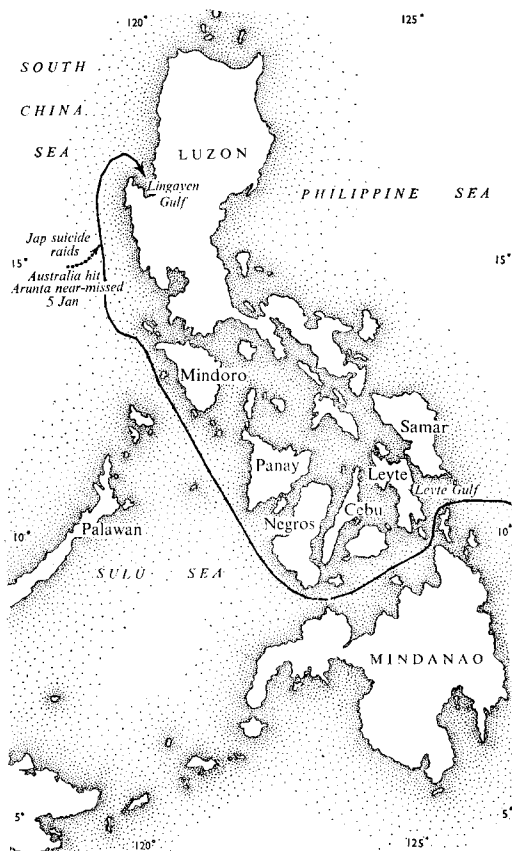
<sup>8</sup> Lt-Cdr C. A. Byrne, OBE, DSC; RANVR. HMS's *Strafnes*, *Peony*, *Kelvin*, *Janus*, *Venomous*; HMAS *Bungaree*; comd HMAS *Warrego* 1944-45. Company director; of Brisbane; b. Toowoomba, Qld, 18 Jan 1903.

<sup>9</sup> They included 6 battleships, 18 escort carriers, 10 cruisers, 41 destroyers, 20 destroyer escorts, transports, supply ships, and about 550 landing craft of various types.

escort carriers and screen; the landing ships of the Lingayen Attack Force; and a Mindoro supply convoy. The fourth group, the transports of the Lingayen Attack Force, TF.79—including H.M.A. Ships *Manoora*, *Kanimbla* and *Westralia*; two escort carriers; and the fleet Flagship, U.S.S. *Wasatch* with Kinkaid and Krueger on board, left Leyte Gulf on the morning of 6th January.

First away, the Mine-sweeping and Hydrographic Group and additions—of whose 85 ships *Warrego* and *Gascoyne* formed the stern coverage to the screen—was first to encounter the enemy. The convoy passed quietly through Surigao Strait and to the westward, at ten knots, and the first—ineffective—air attack by two to three aircraft occurred just on dusk on 2nd January. One of the attackers was shot down. There were several alarms during the night, and at 7.30 a.m. on the 3rd, about ten aircraft attacked. *Gascoyne* was near-missed by a “comparatively large” bomb which hit the water abreast the bridge on the starboard side “but luckily did not explode”. At least four enemy aircraft were shot down by ships’ fire and fighter cover. For the rest of the day, and throughout the 4th, the weather was calm and clear, and the convoy was not attacked. But in *Warrego* “at 5.27 p.m. on 4th a large explosion was heard astern following A.A. fire, and it is assumed that some of the covering forces were being attacked”. The assumption was correct.

Since it entered Surigao Strait at 6.30 a.m. on 3rd January, Oldendorf’s TG.77.2 had had a quiet time until the afternoon of the 4th. It safely traversed the Strait and the Mindanao Sea, and soon after 5 p.m. was almost midway between the island of Panay and the northern tip of Palawan, steering N.N.W. for Mindoro Strait. It was then that “an aircraft



Attack forces approaching Lingayen Gulf,  
3rd-9th January 1945

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[identified as a navy dive bomber] suddenly appeared at about 15,000 feet over the force. He lost no time in going into a steep dive and crashed into *Ommaney Bay*'s<sup>1</sup> flight deck just abaft the bridge. Before long the resulting fire in the hangar was out of control and the ship had to be abandoned and sunk."<sup>2</sup> It was the explosion of the aircraft crashing into the aircraft carrier which was heard over the horizon in *Warrego*.

In this encounter history repeated itself when an innocent watcher came under ineffective fire from the Allied ships. In the first volume of this work<sup>3</sup> it was recorded that during an air attack on the Mediterranean Fleet in the preliminary stages of the Battle of Calabria, "the height of the attacking aircraft, and their appearance as glittering specks, led the 7th Cruiser Squadron to open fire during the afternoon on the planet Venus. It was an indignity the Goddess of Love, in her day-time manifestation in the sky, was often to undergo during the Mediterranean campaign." She was to undergo it in the South-West Pacific also. On this afternoon of air attacks on TG.77.2 on 4th January 1945, Midshipman Francis in *Shropshire* recorded in his diary: "The planet Venus was taken for a high flying aircraft, and, with other ships, *Shropshire* wasted many rounds of ammunition in this direction."

The next enemy encounter of note was with surface craft by H.M.A. Ships *Gascoyne* and *Warrego* and the American destroyer *Bennion*.<sup>4</sup> At 2.40 p.m. on the 5th, two enemy "cruisers" were reported over the horizon astern by an American aircraft, and at 3.50 p.m. they were sighted from the convoy and identified as destroyers. *Bennion*, *Gascoyne* and *Warrego* were detailed to attack, and immediately altered towards the enemy (course due south) at emergency full speed. Range was then 15,000 yards.

At about 3.50 *Gascoyne* and *Warrego* were abreast of each other, and *Bennion* was coming up astern from the head of the convoy. With her greater speed she soon led in line ahead formation. At 3.59 *Bennion* was well out in front of *Gascoyne*, who had *Warrego* about 5,000 yards astern and dropping back. *Bennion* opened fire at 4.5 p.m., her opening salvoes short, as were those of the two Australian ships at 4.8 p.m. and 4.10 p.m. respectively. The Japanese immediately reversed course and retired towards Manila at full speed, making smoke. Then ensued a chase by *Bennion*, who made the range and claimed a few hits. The Japanese return fire was most erratic. At 4.29 p.m., when she was about 3,000 to 4,000 yards ahead of *Gascoyne* and 5,000 ahead of *Warrego*, *Bennion* went into rapid salvoes. She ceased fire at 4.37 p.m., and ten minutes later ordered *Gascoyne* and *Warrego* to rejoin the convoy with her at best speed.

As they were rejoining the convoy, *Gascoyne* recorded, heavy anti-aircraft fire was observed ahead over the convoy, and astern over TG.77.2, the Bombardment and Fire Support Group. Seven suicide bombers attacked

<sup>1</sup> *Ommaney Bay*, US escort carrier (1944), 7,800 tons, one 5-in gun, 28 aircraft, 19 kts. Sunk in Philippines 4 Jan 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Commander TG.74.1, "Report of Proceedings", 1st-31st January 1945.

<sup>3</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, pp. 173-4.

<sup>4</sup> *Bennion*, US destroyer (1943), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

the convoy, but "all were disposed of with the only damage a partial hit on the bows of one L.C.G." TG.77.2 was less fortunate. Commencing at 4.15 p.m., when about 90 miles west of Subic Bay, over a period of two and a half hours, between 50 and 60 aircraft made runs on the group at altitudes varying from 20,000 feet to low over the water. Despite a strong Combat Air Patrol with as many as 58 fighters in the air at the one time, the Japanese *Kamikazes* were able to penetrate the defences, and damaged seven ships.

Two of the damaged ships were Australian.<sup>5</sup> At 5.35 p.m. *Arunta*, on the screen of the leading group, sighted two Japanese aircraft on the port bow, heading straight towards her. Speed was increased to 25 knots and fire was opened with a barrage set to 3,000 yards.

One of the enemy planes veered to the right. The other headed straight for our bridge. The wheel was put hard a'starboard and, thanks to the extreme manoeuvring ability of the Tribal class destroyer, the plane missed by feet. It plunged into the sea alongside the Gear room on the port side. The plane, a Zero, carried a bomb, estimated to be 250 lbs. The subsequent explosion holed the ship's side in several places and severed the electrical leads to both steering motors. The ship continued to circle with the wheel hard a'starboard for about five minutes, as while enemy planes were still attacking I was anxious to keep moving.<sup>6</sup> *Arunta's* casualties in this attack included two killed.<sup>7</sup>

At 5.42 *Arunta* had to stop to repair damage caused by the explosion. The American destroyer *Ingraham*<sup>8</sup> stood by, circling slowly until repairs were completed at 10.55 p.m., when both ships proceeded at 25 knots for Lingayen Gulf. As Commander Buchanan remarked in *Arunta's* Action Report, "We were fortunate perhaps that darkness covered most of this period of involuntary immobility."

Meanwhile, in the rear division the other Australian ship damaged in this attack, *Australia*, received a direct hit and suffered severe casualties in a determined attack made on the division by at least six aircraft, which flew in low, just above the water, and were taken under fire by all ships.

One was splashed abreast the destroyer screen and one altered course to pass astern. The remainder came in weaving low and fast despite intense anti-aircraft fire. They crossed ahead of HMAS *Australia*, two within a hundred yards. One went on to score a hit on the escort carrier *Manila Bay*, and another executed a very steep turn to the right, and ending in a vertical dive hit HMAS *Australia* on the port side of the upper deck amidships at 5.35. This plane carried a bomb which was responsible for a number of casualties. The resulting fire was quickly subdued.

Material damage was slight, and guns put out of action were soon effective again. The major loss of fighting efficiency was due to casualties. There were

some 25 killed and 30 wounded. These comprised the whole of P.2 guns crew; eight members of P.1 guns crew; members of Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10 Bofors and

<sup>5</sup> The other five were American: *Louisville* and destroyer escort *Stafford* seriously damaged; escort carrier *Manila Bay*, moderate damage; and escort carrier *Savo Island* and destroyer *Helm*, minor damage. The American ships suffered 99 casualties.

<sup>6</sup> *Arunta* Action Report.

<sup>7</sup> Those killed were Able Seaman H. L. E. Sellick and Stoker Petty Officer R. A. Hand.

<sup>8</sup> *Ingraham*, US destroyer (1944), 2,200 tons, six 5-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

members of, including the captains of the guns, both port and starboard multiple pompoms, as well as most of the upper deck ammunition supply parties. Three officers were killed and one wounded.<sup>9</sup>

While TG.77.2 was under attack on the afternoon of the 5th, some 400 miles astern in the western entrance to the Mindanao Sea the large third group had its first encounter with the enemy when a midget submarine fired two torpedoes at *Boise*. Damage was averted by prompt manoeuvring, and the submarine was damaged by an aircraft of the anti-submarine patrol; it was then rammed, depth charged, and probably sunk by the destroyer *Taylor*.

#### IV

At dawn on 6th January the Minesweeping and Hydrographic Group and the Bombardment Group met off the entrance to Lingayen Gulf and, with destroyers as close support and the Bombardment Group as cover, the minesweepers started their sweeping operations in the entrance. Owing to the absence of mines, the Bombardment Group was able to enter the Gulf earlier than expected, and by 10.45 a.m. the bombardments of Cape Bolinao by the van section, and of Poro Point by the rear section, had commenced. *Australia* and *Shropshire* were with the San Fabian Fire Support Unit under Rear-Admiral Weyler, which commenced its bombardment runs just before 11 a.m. Both ships carried out bombardments on Poro Point, and the bay and town of San Fernando, on the east side of Lingayen Gulf. *Arunta* and *Warramunga* were assigned to support the minesweeping group.

Throughout the day there were sporadic air attacks, mainly by suicide aircraft, and a number of ships were damaged, including the battleship *New Mexico*. She was in column ahead of *Shropshire* when, at 12.3 p.m., she was hit by a suicide aircraft. It seemed to observers in *Shropshire* that the aircraft was diving on *Australia*, who was astern of *Shropshire*. But it increased height, passed down *Shropshire*'s starboard side at mast-head height, and crashed into the port side of *New Mexico*'s bridge. *Shropshire* scored several hits on this aircraft, and shot away its tail as it passed. Eight minutes later *Shropshire* was near missed on the starboard side abreast the bridge by an aircraft "which dived from the sun. It was hit by A.A. fire and, narrowly missing the top of 'B' turret, crashed into the sea alongside the bridge."<sup>10</sup> A few minutes after this, at 12.19 p.m., two fast, low-flying aircraft—"obviously suiciders"—appeared out of a gap in the hills to the westward. The nearer one was taken under fire by *Warramunga*, crossed the destroyer's bow at about 800 yards, and crashed into the American destroyer-transport *Brooks*, which was lying stopped half a mile away. *Warramunga* went to the aid of the American ship, which was burning fiercely amidships, and lying stopped beam on to

<sup>9</sup> *Australia* Action Report, Mike 1 Operation. Examination of the Surgeon's journal and other available sources has failed to establish the actual dates on which the fatal casualties—suffered in this and a second attack next day—occurred, i.e. on 5th or 6th January. The names of those who lost their lives in the two attacks are therefore grouped in footnote 1 below.

<sup>10</sup> *Shropshire*'s Action Report.



wind and swell. She had no steam and could not fight the fire, and most of her crew and injured were on the forecastle. Commander Alliston took *Warramunga* alongside *Brooks*' lee-side, and his Damage Control parties, backed up by Supply parties, got to work on the fires. The main one was amidships, where the crashed aircraft had ploughed a large hole in the deck above the engine room, and had knocked down one funnel. A secondary fire—but potentially more dangerous because the superstructure under which it burned contained a 3-inch magazine—was abaft the bridge. *Warramunga* concentrated on this while transferring wounded from *Brooks*' forecastle to her own. Alliston's task was not easy, since "*Brooks* had the wreckage of boats and davits fouling her port side, and *Warramunga* had to be manoeuvred continuously to maintain an angle of about 30 degrees between the two ships. The only point of contact was the forecastle. This made the fire-fighting task considerably more difficult."

At 1.48 p.m. on the 6th both fires were out, and *Warramunga* had passed her towing wire to the American ship and at 1.50 set a northerly course up Lingayen Gulf, towing *Brooks* at seven knots. At 4.25 p.m. they passed the battleships and cruisers of TG.77.2, which entered the lower end of Lingayen Gulf at 3 p.m., followed by *Gascoyne* and *Warrego*. Japanese suicide attacks became frequent, and a number of ships suffered damage and casualties. *New Mexico* was hit a second time at about 2.36 p.m. At 5.15 the Bombardment Group commenced to retire from the Gulf by reversing course, thus placing *Gascoyne* and *Warrego* in the van.

At 5.34 p.m. *Australia* was again a victim of a suicide aircraft. She was then astern of *Shropshire*, and Midshipman Francis in that ship recorded how "the plane, a Navy type dive-bomber, came in with one wheel down on our starboard quarter. In my opinion this plane was coming for us, but after flying through a Bofors and eight-inch barrage he turned away in favour of crashing into *Australia* amidships."

*Australia* recorded how

At 5.34 a "Val" dived on the ship from the starboard quarter, and flattening out, hit the ship on the upper deck between S.2 and S.1. This plane also carried a bomb which, from fragments found, appeared to have been converted from a large calibre shell. The resulting fire was quickly subdued, though "A" boiler room had to be shut down temporarily. Material damage affecting the fighting efficiency was confined mainly to S.2 mounting. Both guns were put out of action and all form of control destroyed. . . . Again the major damage to fighting efficiency was through casualties. There were 14 killed and 26 wounded. (The whole of S.2 gun's crew and most of S.1.) Subsequently, except for a special bombardment firing, there were only sufficient crews to man one 4-inch mounting each side, a large proportion being casualty replacements.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Those killed in *Australia* in the Japanese *Kamikaze* attacks at Lingayen Gulf on 5th and 6th January 1945 were: Sub-Lt K. Levy, RANR; Lt M. H. Marsh, RAN; Lt C. N. Russell, RAN; AB N. W. Andersen, AB J. Annear, AB C. R. Avery, AB F. Beake, AB J. T. H. Bourke, OD M. G. Brown, OD W. G. Brown, OD R. Clifford, AB A. A. De Vere, AB C. D. Donnelly, AB F. W. Eames, OD N. J. Everson, Ldg Seaman E. J. Ezard, AB W. R. Fisher, OD H. D. Ford, AB G. R. Frawley, OD R. J. Gannon, AB W. G. Gummow, AB E. L. Hardeman, AB L. L. Hart, AB V. W. Hearne, AB L. I. Herdman, AB C. M. Hughes, AB H. Kennedy, AB M. D. Kirchner, AB A. W. Lade, AB M. S. Loud, AB R. Meddings, AB C. Moore, Ldg Seaman J. J. Moore, AB W. T. Munday, Ldg Seaman H. E. O'Neill, AB N. Pringle, AB G. C. Reeve, AB G. W. Riley, Ldg Seaman S. C. Rowley, AB I. S. Sharman, AB P. S. Utting, AB R. A. Verdon, AB C. R. Ward, AB H. R. Whittaker.

Meanwhile, *Gascoyne* and *Warrego* overtook *Warramunga* and her tow and remained in company to screen them. Japanese aircraft attacks continued, and *Gascoyne* recorded that

our little force found themselves between the battlefleet and the setting sun, a most unenviable position. Fortunately these attacks, which except one were all low level, swept past the sun to attack the main force astern of us. The exception was one vertical dive bomber which came in over *Shropshire* practically unnoticed. We opened fire with our after 4-inch, range about 4,000 yards, and by a great stroke of fortune hit the bomber with the first round just as it commenced to dive. The plane immediately disintegrated. This was later confirmed by *Shropshire*, who "complained" that our shell splinters had splattered her quarterdeck.

Relief from air attacks came with darkness, and the battlefleet and the *Warramunga* group stood off the Gulf during the night. At dawn on the 7th *Warramunga's* tow parted, and *Gascoyne* took *Brooks* in tow "just at the time the battlefleet emerged out of the morning gloom to seaward. They had to make an emergency turn away to clear us." *Gascoyne*, screened by *Warramunga* and *Warrego*, towed *Brooks* to the shallows off Santiago Island, where the American ship anchored at noon. *Brooks'* ship's company (excepting her Commanding Officer and 12 men who remained in her as a salvage party), totalling 12 officers and 110 men, were then embarked in *Warramunga* and taken by her at 25 knots to the southern end of Lingayen Gulf, where the Bombardment Group had returned to resume bombardments, and were transferred to U.S.S. *Pennsylvania*.

## V

In Lingayen Gulf, 7th January was a quiet day so far as air attacks were concerned. The Bombardment Group re-entered the Gulf at 6 a.m. and carried out the firings scheduled for the day. *Australia* and *Shropshire* were allocated a counter-battery role, in the course of which *Shropshire* was straddled by a number of shells from a shore battery. *Australia* recorded having little to do. Rounds were fired at railway store-sheds and certain positions where it was thought pill-boxes or camouflaged gun emplacements might be situated. An occasional shell, possibly of 6-inch calibre,

landed in our area, and various suspected firing positions were engaged, but the gun appeared to be mobile. At about 1600 HMAS *Shropshire* considered she had located a firing position and this was engaged by both ships. There was no further trouble, and it was considered the gun was silenced.

*Arunta* was allocated bombardment areas near the town of Dagupan. "This day," Buchanan recorded, "the enemy had been very subdued. The rough handling he had received the day before had apparently chastened his suicidal spirit."

It was one of the convoys on its way to Lingayen Gulf—the third, and largest group—which was this day the object of enemy attack. Two enemy aircraft were shot down by ships of the convoy in an attack during the evening. Later, about 10.25 p.m., a Japanese destroyer was encountered

off Manila Bay. Four of the convoy's destroyers were sent in to deal with it, and the enemy ship (of the *Hatsuharu*-class) was reported sunk after a brief engagement.<sup>2</sup>

On 8th January *Australia* suffered her third and fourth suicide aircraft attacks within a few minutes. She was last in line of the Bombardment Force as it moved into the Gulf after having stood off shore during the night. At 7.20 a.m. a Japanese two-engined plane

was sighted coming in low on the port quarter. HMAS *Australia*, last in the line, opened fire and at the same time four patrolling "Wild Cats" attacked. The enemy plane was splashed twenty yards from the ship and skidded into the ship's side doing little damage. . . . At 7.39 a second aircraft attacked from the same quarter and was put down just short of the ship but hit the ship on the waterline below the bridge. It carried a bomb which exploded short of or against the ship's side and blew a hole 14 feet by eight feet, opening a provision room and one oil tank to the sea and flooding bilges. The ship took a list of five degrees to port and adjacent compartments commenced to flood slowly. The list was corrected and flooding brought under control, and shoring up of bulkheads carried out.

Fortunately the casualties in these two attacks were minor in character, "mostly shock". Referring to the second attack, *Australia*'s report said that the fact of the light casualties "was remarkable, since a lot of shrapnel, one engine and a propeller came inboard and landed in various parts of the ship".

Despite her damage, *Australia* met her scheduled bombardment engagements, though the blast effect of firing her forward 8-inch guns on the port side was straining the inner bulkheads, so that it was decided not to fire them on that side except in an emergency. Scheduled firings commenced at 8 a.m. on the 8th in the Lingayen and San Fabian areas, and later in the San Fernando area, in preparation for the next day's landings. That day's approach was simultaneous with that of the assault convoys, which were now nearing the Gulf, and attracting the attention of suicide aircraft as they passed up the west coast of Luzon.

A few minutes after *Australia* suffered her fourth attack inside the Gulf, the escort carrier *Kadashan Bay*, with Task Group 77.5, north-west of Subic Bay, was crashed by an aircraft and had a 15-foot hole blown in her side. Other ships were variously damaged by near misses.

Round about 7 p.m. the Transport Groups of Wilkinson's TF.79 were west of Lingayen Gulf, with Group B leading, and Group A, including *Manoora*, *Kanimbla* and *Westralia*, ten miles astern. Between the two groups was Rear-Admiral R. A. Ofstie's TU.77.4.3 comprising the escort carriers *Kitkun Bay* and *Shamrock Bay*<sup>3</sup> and two destroyers. Vice-Admiral Kinkaid in his flagship *Wasatch* joined TF.79 on 6th January, and at 6 p.m. on the 8th MacArthur in *Boise* joined the formation. Just before 7 p.m. *Kitkun Bay* was seriously damaged by a suicide aircraft.

*Westralia* recorded a busy hour commencing at 6 p.m.

<sup>2</sup> There is in post-war official records no mention of a destroyer being sunk on 7th January 1945. The only *Hatsuharu*-class vessel surviving in January 1945 was *Hatsushimo* and she was not sunk until 30th July 1945.

<sup>3</sup> *Shamrock Bay*, US escort carrier (1944), 7,800 tons, one 5-in gun, 28 aircraft, 19 kts.

Six enemy aircraft attacked the convoy, and three [four according to *Kanimbla*] were intercepted by carrier-based air cover on our port quarter, and after a thrilling dog fight fought at a low altitude all enemy planes were shot down without loss. At approximately the same time another was shot down into the sea by our fighters. At 1850 an enemy suicide bomber attacked the escort carrier *Kitkun Bay*, crashing into the stern, causing casualties and disabling the ship, which had to be taken in tow by tugs. Shortly after this attack a Zeke [Navy fighter aircraft] made a suicide attack on *Westralia*. The enemy approached on a bearing of Red 170 and carried out a steep dive obviously aimed at the bridge. A very good barrage was put up and *Westralia's* guns' crews remained at their guns and kept up well aimed fire eventually causing the aircraft to crash about ten feet astern in a disintegrated condition. The after end of the ship was showered with flying wreckage and one rating, Leading Stoker Chapman,<sup>4</sup> was slightly wounded. The steering gear was also temporarily disabled, but was in action again in approximately 18 minutes.

CTG.79.1, Rear-Admiral Kiland, officially credited *Westralia* with the destruction of the aircraft, and that ship's commanding officer, Lieut-Commander Livingston, remarked in his report that "the fine work done by the guns' crews actually saved the ship". He singled out Able Seamen Jeffery<sup>5</sup> and Mitchell<sup>6</sup>, and Sapper Jaensch<sup>7</sup> as having been "particularly outstanding in their devotion to duty".

During the day the Bombardment Group carried out bombardments on Lingayen, San Fabian and San Fernando. Just after 6 p.m. Oldendorf reported to Kinkaid that bombardment disclosed practically no military installations or targets in the Lingayen area and relatively few in the San Fabian. The bombardment of San Fernando, last for the day, was completed at 6.40 p.m., and the Bombardment Group spent the night cruising at slow speed in the inner approaches to the Lingayen Gulf, since the whole outer approaches were "filling up with transports, etc".

Meanwhile, during the 8th, *Gascoyne* and *YMS316*<sup>8</sup> of the Hydrographic Group completed laying buoys marking the boat lanes to the beaches of the morrow's landings. Considerable difficulty occurred in positioning the buoys correctly owing to the smoke and dust from the bombardments

and the fact that some bombardment ship or other was always just where we wanted to get to, or else, having chosen our position, a group of sweepers would commence their sweep in our area just at the moment of laying. Only one buoy was swept up, however, and as the day progressed we all began to understand each other's habits.

All buoys were laid by 4 p.m.

## VI

Weather conditions for the landings on 9th January were excellent. There was little wind and practically no swell. Dawn followed an unusually

<sup>4</sup> Ldg Stoker W. L. Chapman, S5060. HMAS's *Wollongong* and *Westralia*. Of Russell Vale, NSW; b. Russell Vale, 17 Nov 1921.

<sup>5</sup> AB L. G. Jeffery, DSM, B3591. HMAS's *Wilcannia*, *Gascoyne* and *Westralia*. Of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 8 Jun 1924.

<sup>6</sup> AB A. J. Mitchell, DSM, PA1895. HMAS's *Canberra*, *Kanimbla* and *Westralia*. Of Adelaide; b. Adelaide, 6 Jul 1923.

<sup>7</sup> Spr W. R. Jaensch, MM, VX57613. 2 Aust Landing Ships Detachment. Orchard worker; of Red Cliffs, Vic; b. Mildura, Vic, 17 Jun 1920.

<sup>8</sup> *YMS316*, US motor minesweeper (1942-45), 207 tons, one 3-in gun, 13 kts.



the attack group anchored close inshore, some 4,000 yards from the beach. All the transports' boats were ordered away, and the disembarkation of troops and equipment commenced from *Manoora* and her sisters. Simultaneously the ships of Admiral Barbey's TF.78 anchored off San Fabian beaches and commenced disembarkation.

Meanwhile the pre-landing bombardment was in progress, and "the din", recorded Cousin in *Manoora's* Action Report, "was terrific. Fire was directed by float spotter planes over the area." The Bombardment Group was off the beaches at dawn. Of the San Fabian group, *West Virginia* and *Shropshire* were in the centre of the San Fabian area; *New Mexico* and *Minneapolis* were on the left flank; and *Mississippi* and *Australia* were on the right. *Arunta*, too, was with the San Fabian group. The battleships commenced their bombardment at 7 a.m. *Shropshire* opened fire at 8.30 at targets in San Fabian town. *Australia*, farther west, also began her bombardment at 8.30, with the town of Dagupan and various road and rail junctions as targets. *Arunta* opened fire at dawn and continued until just after 10 a.m., on a variety of targets. "All this time," recorded Buchanan, "the Gulf was being filled with shipping. It looked like a suiciders' paradise; but our control of the air was so complete that only a few single planes attempted to attack, and they had but indifferent success." *Warramunga*, away to the westward with the Lingayen force, also opened fire at 8.30 and, recorded Alliston, "ceased at 5.30 p.m. During this time fire was intermittent."

Though, as Buchanan recorded, "only a few single planes attempted to attack", they were not without some successes. At 7.25 a.m. the destroyer escort *Hodges*<sup>9</sup> was hit and damaged by a suicide aircraft, and twenty minutes later the light cruiser *Columbia* was hit, but was soon able to resume bombarding. The landing was scheduled for 9.30 a.m. At 9.10 rocket fire commenced from L.C.I. gunboats preceding the landing craft towards the beaches, and bombardment ships shifted gunfire to both flanks of the beachhead, and thereafter engaged targets of opportunity. From *Manoora*, Commander Green, on board the L.S.I. as an observer under instructions from Barbey "to participate in the landing at Lingayen and observe the Australian L.S.I.'s under combat operational conditions", landed with the first assault wave, which he accompanied to the village of Binmaley. Describing the landing in his report, Green wrote:

All boats were lowered and combat troops embarked without mishap, and as the boats moved inshore practically the entire countryside in the vicinity of the beach was shrouded in smoke from the exploding shells of the naval bombardment. My chief impression as we approached the beach was the seemingly ever increasing thunder of the rocket bombardment. All waves of landing craft approached the beach with admirable station-keeping and as we neared the shore of Crimson Beach there was no opposition fire whatsoever.

This was the general experience at the Lingayen beaches. They

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<sup>9</sup> *Hodges*, US destroyer escort (1944), 1,450 tons, two 5-in guns, three 21-in torpedo tubes, 24 kts.

lay open to "the high winds which often lash Lingayen Gulf into a white-capped fury", and immediately behind them lay "numerous swamps and fish ponds, intertwined by many streams and several fair-sized rivers, which could only be traversed over a series of easily defended causeways and bridges". Such disadvantages caused the Japanese, when they invaded Luzon in December 1941, to regard these beaches as unsuitable for an amphibious assault, and they assumed that the Americans would take the same view.<sup>10</sup>

#### On shore, Green found

the devastation caused by the rockets and naval bombardment was almost indescribable. Huge craters pitted the ground and most of the trees were either shorn off or riddled with shrapnel. The village of Binmaley presented a dismal sight; nearly every hut had been wrecked and it was obvious that the place would have to be completely rebuilt before it would become habitable.

At 9.30 a.m. all firing ceased as the first assault waves landed on San Fabian beach. Three minutes later the first Lingayen beach landings were made. There was some Japanese mortar fire at White Beach, San Fabian, where a number of landing craft were hit, with some casualties. But there was no opposition at the Lingayen beaches, where all assault waves landed on schedule. At noon it was reported that San Fabian was captured.

The main enemy opposition continued to be in the form of *Kamikaze* attacks, and at 1 p.m. *Australia* sustained her fifth suicide crash. She had completed her scheduled bombardments by 10.30 a.m. and, since no targets of opportunity were sighted either from her or the spotting plane, had not again fired. At 1.11 p.m. two aircraft were sighted coming in from the east. One dived past *Australia* and hit U.S.S. *Mississippi* near the bridge. The other came in ahead of *Australia* after a curving dive, and tried to hit the cruiser's bridge and fore controls.

He missed his aim, however, and diving under the foreyard his wing tip caught on a mast strut which swung him into the foremost funnel and over the side. There was no other material damage than cutting off the top third of the funnel, which necessitated closing down two boilers in "A" boiler room, and damage to radar and WT aerials, which was quickly repaired. There were no casualties. A hole was cut in the damaged funnel by next day and all boilers were again in action. So ended *Australia's* last operation in the war.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the discharging of the three Australian L.S.I's continued to schedule. Around 10.30 a.m. the three ships weighed, and proceeded inshore from the outer anchorage to the inner transport area, 4,000 yards from the beach. *Westralia* was first of the three to complete discharge, at 5.30 p.m., the best part of an hour ahead of *Kanimbla* and *Manoora*. *Manoora's* figures give an idea of what was achieved by the Australian L.S.I's in the Lingayen Gulf operation. The total time taken to discharge *Manoora's* 465½ tons of cargo, in 219 lifts, was five hours and one minute. This worked out at about 93 tons per hour, or an average of 31 tons per hour per hold. *Kanimbla* and *Westralia* each achieved a similarly satisfactory performance, and of them Cousin, as Senior Naval Officer Australian

<sup>10</sup> Morison, Vol XIII, p. 126. He was quoting from Sixth Army Report I 7, and MacArthur, *Historical Report* II 434.

<sup>1</sup> *Australia*, Action Report.

Landing Ships, wrote in *Manoora's* action report: "H.M.A.S. *Kanimbla* and *Westralia* performed their assault landing in an exemplary manner; the Commanding Officers, officers and ship's companies of these ships are a credit to Australia."

On shore, progress was rapid against little opposition. The only enemy resistance encountered was on the extreme left flank. Just after 2 p.m. General MacArthur, with members of his staff, went on shore at San Fabian beaches, where they remained for three hours or so. By dusk the invaders had pressed inland. On the extreme right flank the 40th Division seized the 5,000-foot Lingayen airstrip, and found it in excellent condition; and then secured the town of Lingayen. By dusk various penetrations up to 6,000 and 8,000 yards deep had been made. "It was almost too easy," recorded the American naval historian, "the soldiers were given no foretaste of the rough days ahead for them."<sup>2</sup>

## VII

Dusk on 9th January, with the removal of the Combat Air Patrol, ushered in a dangerous time for the ships in Lingayen Gulf. As many as possible of the unloaded transports and other vessels were sent back to Leyte, and thus the *Kamikaze* target was reduced. The three Australian L.S.I's weighed anchor just before 8 p.m. to join a Leyte convoy. During the afternoon *Manoora* embarked twelve serious casualties from *Australia*. Stretcher cases, they were hoisted from two boats to *Manoora's* starboard gunport door. It was an occasion which moved her Executive Officer, Lieutenant-Commander B. Paul, to comment in his "Report on the Operation in Lingayen Gulf":

It is hoped that the sight of these men will help to curb the insatiable curiosity of many of the officers and ratings who expose themselves unnecessarily during air attacks.

In preparation for a dusk attack by the *Kamikaze* aircraft, all ships made smoke at 6.24 p.m., so that an effective blanket lay over the target. Consequently, though there were several *Kamikaze* attacks during the hour after sunset, no ship was hit by a suicide plane. But one, the battleship *Colorado*, suffered 18 killed or mortally wounded as the result of a hit on the bridge at 7.5 p.m. by a "friendly" 5-inch shell, which had formed part of the anti-*Kamikaze* barrage put up by the ships. Five minutes after *Colorado* was hit, Vice-Admiral Kinkaid recorded in his Action Report: "The only undamaged heavy ships are *Pennsylvania*, *West Virginia*, H.M.A.S. *Shropshire*, and *Portland*."

Towards evening *Australia* was directed to report to Vice-Admiral Wilkinson and, with the damaged American ships *Louisville* and *Columbia*, was detailed with *Arunta* to join the fast transport group returning to Leyte. Of 36 ships, this convoy—TU.79.14.1—was in six columns, of which the Australian ships were in the starboard wing column in the

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<sup>2</sup> Morison, Vol XIII, p. 136.



order *Australia*, *Columbia*, *Louisville*, *Manoora*, *Westralia*, *Kanimbla*. Escorts comprised eleven American destroyers and H.M.A.S. *Arunta*. The passage to Leyte, where the convoy arrived in the afternoon of 12th January, was uneventful.

During the Lingayen Gulf operation H.M.A.S. *Australia* was hit five times by suicide bombers and except for the hole in her side and the casualties among anti-aircraft guns' crews her fighting efficiency was not impaired beyond the capacity of temporary repairs. Captain Armstrong reported of this:

In the matter of casualties we were lucky, as other ships with only one or two hits had more casualties. Two of the attackers were definitely put down before hitting the ship, two did not appear to be affected by our A.A. fire, and one missed his aim, which may have been due to A.A. fire. I consider that the same number of hits from bombs or torpedoes would probably have done much more damage. The behaviour of the ship's company which I have the honour to command was in accordance with the traditions of the service. They were steady under attack, and action to repair and make good damage was taken promptly and efficiently.

*Australia* was the recipient of many signals before her departure from Lingayen Gulf, both from American and her fellow Australian ships. TG.77.2, Vice-Admiral Oldendorf, signalled: "Your gallant conduct and that of your ship has been an inspiration to all of us. Sorry to lose you at this time." Berkey, CTG.77.3, said "Sorry the Hell Birds concentrated on you. My deep regrets for losses in the stout ship's company." Rear-Admiral Weyler, in his letter forwarding the Report of Bombardments, commented: "The performance of *Australia* is particularly to be commended. Heavily hit three times and with the greater part of her dual purpose battery out of commission, she nevertheless executed scheduled fires in her usual effective manner." And Kinkaid, Commander Seventh Fleet, in a report to the Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet, remarked: "H.M.A.S. *Australia* received two minor and three major hits from enemy suicide planes. Despite the resulting damage and casualties, the fire schedule was executed in a very satisfactory manner. Her performance during the entire operation was excellent."

On arrival at Leyte, preparations were made to put a temporary patch on the hole in *Australia's* side, and when this was done she was sent to Manus on her way south to Australia for repairs.

Due to exigencies, Commodore Farncomb returned to Leyte in *Australia*. It was his intention to transfer with his staff to *Shropshire* before *Australia* left Lingayen Gulf, but when that ship and *Arunta* were ordered to join TU.79.14.1, *Shropshire* was not in the vicinity and he was unable to transfer his pendant before *Australia* sailed. At Leyte, it was found feasible to fit *Arunta* for further operational service with the facilities there available, and Farncomb thereupon arranged to return in her to Lingayen and transfer to *Shropshire* on arrival. This he did, and joined *Shropshire* at Lingayen on the afternoon of 22nd January. In recording this in his report of the operation, Commodore Farncomb wrote:

I consider it an honour that H.M.A. Ships *Australia*, *Shropshire*, *Arunta* and *Warramunga* should have formed part of the vanguard of the Lingayen operation. I saw *Gascoyne* and *Warrego* only occasionally as their duties were with the Minesweeping and Hydrographic Group, but was glad to see that they were also in the forefront.

And he closed his report with a comment on what was a sore subject with the ships' companies of the Australian ships at the time:

As always, when we leave our base for operations, the mail service has been bad. . . . There have been many opportunities for forwarding mails in convoys from Leyte to Lingayen, but so far no mails have been received by this means. There is still no indication as to when our mails may be expected. It is strongly urged that this unsatisfactory state of affairs should be rectified as early as possible.

The mail situation at this period caused considerable dissatisfaction, and most of the Australian ships with Seventh Fleet commented on it in their reports. On receipt of Commodore Farncomb's observations at Navy Office, the matter was referred by the Second Naval Member, Commodore Showers, to the R.A.N. Liaison Officer with Seventh Fleet Service Force "for information and necessary action", but it was some time before the cause for complaint was removed.

## CHAPTER 22

### THE BRITISH PACIFIC FLEET JOINS IN

WHEN Commodore Farncomb returned to Lingayen Gulf and hoisted his pendant in *Shropshire* on 22nd January, the amphibious phase of the operation was over. Things were quiet in the Gulf itself after some days of considerable tension. Between 10th and 18th January TG.77.2, including *Shropshire* and *Warramunga*, operated off the Gulf as part of the Luzon Defence Force<sup>1</sup> in support of the Escort Carrier Group, and as cover against enemy surface forces. The escort carriers flew large numbers of sorties each day, and covered the offensive on shore until captured airfields could be brought into operation. Until 13th January, *Kamikaze* attacks were a major worry, both to ships in the Gulf and to the reinforcement convoys and those returning to Leyte, and considerable damage to ships was incurred, with many casualties. These attacks ceased on that date, however. As was learned after the war, by 12th January the Japanese had expended their aircraft in the Philippines. Many had been withdrawn to Formosa, where they reorganised at Tainan airfield, and the *Kamikazes* were next heard from on 21 January when they attacked TF.38; but for the most part, from 13 January to the Iwo Jima operation, they remained grounded. For the Allies they now seemed but a horrible dream. Unfortunately, like other bad dreams, this one recurred.<sup>2</sup>

On 13th January General MacArthur landed and set up his headquarters in Dagupan, and the same day General Krueger assumed command of Sixth Army ashore. By 16th January Sixth Army controlled a beach-head almost 30 miles deep and of about the same width.

On 17th January, with shore-based fighters operating from Lingayen airfields, General Kenney became responsible for all air operations over Luzon, and the Luzon Defence Force was dispersed. On the 18th TG.77.2 re-entered the Gulf and anchored in the Transport Area at the southern end, where it remained until the end of the month. Eight of the escort carriers, with a screen of 14 destroyers, sailed under Rear-Admiral Durgin for Ulithi in preparation for the Iwo Jima operation. Six others, with a similar screen, under Rear-Admiral Stump, remained with Seventh Fleet until the end of January, operating with Berkeley's Close Covering Group off north-western Mindoro.

The securing of the Mindoro-Lingayen communication line was a major concern of Admiral Kinkaid's, since it was the only practical route to the beach-head while the Japanese held northern Luzon and Manila. It had to be assumed that the enemy would try to cut it by surface force attack,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Formed on 10th January, the Luzon Defence Force comprised TG's 77.2 (Bombardment and Fire Support Group), 77.3 (Berkeley's Close Covering Group), and 77.4 (Durgin's Escort Carrier Group), with Admiral Oldendorf as over-all commander.

<sup>2</sup> Morison, Vol XIII, p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> It was only about three weeks since, as stated earlier, an enemy cruiser and destroyer force had bombarded Mindoro after the American landing there.

and an attempt was made to destroy the means of his doing so. Throughout January Halsey's Third Fleet ranged the South China Sea, with the aircraft of TF.38 striking heavily at widespread targets including Indo-China, Hainan, Hong Kong, the Pescadores, Formosa, the Sakishima group and Okinawa. In spite of continuous bad weather, Third Fleet's activities in support of the Luzon campaign were fruitful. During its South China Sea foray it sank or destroyed 61 Japanese ships totalling 301,376 tons, and destroyed 615 aircraft. When endorsing Halsey's Action Report of the China Sea sortie, Nimitz described it as "well conceived and brilliantly executed", but regretted "that more important targets were not within reach of the Task Force's destructive sweep". These "more important targets" were the Japanese capital ships, which had retired well out of range of Third Fleet aircraft.

The enemy hit back on 21st January, when TF.38 was about 100 miles east of Formosa, in a series of *Kamikaze* attacks which damaged a number of ships and caused fatal casualties. In all, the cost to Third Fleet in its South China Sea attacks was 201 carrier aircraft, 167 pilots and crewmen, and 205 sailors who were killed in the *Kamikaze* attacks on the 21st. Third Fleet arrived at Ulithi on 25th January. At midnight on the 26th Admiral Spruance assumed tactical command vice Halsey, and Third Fleet became Fifth Fleet. As such it was to operate under Spruance at Iwo Jima in the immediate future.

## II

The forthcoming Iwo Jima operation, and that scheduled for Okinawa, caused Nimitz now to seek release of Pacific Fleet units from the Philippines as soon as possible. Kinkaid and MacArthur were reluctant to let them go. The admiral stressed his need of cruisers and destroyers to protect the Luzon Defence Force and the merchant shipping at Lingayen, Mindoro and Leyte and to screen the convoys. MacArthur concurred, but was himself more concerned over Nimitz's intention to recall from Seventh Fleet *California* and *New Mexico*, two of the six battleships, for repairs to battle damage. He felt that this would leave Seventh Fleet in a weak position between two Japanese naval forces—one including the battleships *Ise* and *Hyuga*, which had been located in Lingga Roads, Singapore; and the other formed around *Yamato*, *Nagato*, *Haruna* and *Kongo* in the Inland Sea. Nimitz, for his part, though sympathising generally with Kinkaid and MacArthur, did not share MacArthur's apprehensions of an enemy battleship attack on Seventh Fleet, and considered that the best defence of the Philippines would be offensive operations against Japan. He commented that if a local naval defence force capable of meeting all heavy ships left in the Japanese fleet were retained continuously on station, further major operations in the Pacific would have to be postponed indefinitely.

In the event Oldendorf, with *California* and *New Mexico*, left Leyte on 22nd January. The other four Pacific Fleet battleships—*Pennsylvania*,

*West Virginia*, *Colorado* and *Mississippi*, constituting TF.72.2 under Rear-Admiral Weyler, remained with Seventh Fleet until 10th February. Kinkaid was also granted temporary retention of the cruisers *Portland* and *Minneapolis*, and of 22 of the destroyers he sought. To protect the Mindoro-Lingayen line he now allotted 4 light cruisers, 17 destroyers, 6 escort carriers and 4 destroyer-escorts to a task group to be alternately commanded by Rear-Admirals Berkey and Stump. *Shropshire*, *Arunta* and *Warramunga* formed part of Weyler's TG.77.2, the Lingayen Defence Force, until 10th February, when Weyler and TG.77.2 returned to Pacific Ocean areas. Farncomb, as CTU.77.3.5—*Shropshire* (Flag), *Portland*, *Minneapolis*, and destroyers *Conway*, *Eaton*, *Braine*,<sup>4</sup> *Frazier*,<sup>5</sup> *Arunta* and *Warramunga*—reported to Rear-Admiral Berkey for duty, and was given the mission to remain at Lingayen as covering and defence force.

### III

One Australian ship particularly active at this period was *Warrego*. By 29th January the army, driving south from Lingayen Gulf, had advanced to San Fernando.<sup>6</sup> Progress had been hindered by the Japanese blowing up bridges, ripping up the railway and building road blocks. To help things along the navy, on 29th January, landed XI Corps on the coast of Zambales Province, about 45 miles across a mountain range from San Fernando. This landing took place over beaches in front of the little towns of San Felipe, San Narciso and San Antonio, with the object of sealing off the Bataan Peninsula. Rear-Admiral Struble commanded Amphibious Group 9 in Flagship *Mount McKinley*. Two transport divisions, with a number of Liberty ships and the necessary landing craft, landed some 30,000 troops under the close cover of light cruiser *Denver* and two destroyers, and army aircraft from Leyte.

*Warrego*, which had left Lingayen Gulf for Leyte for repairs on 12th January, sailed thence for the landing operation on 26th January as part of a screen of 15 ships accompanying a convoy of 24 transports. The area was reached at dawn on the 29th. *Denver* and the two destroyers were ready to bombard when word was received that no enemy were there, and landings were made without bombardment. Before the landing *Warrego* and *YMS316* marked inshore shoals. Later in the morning they proceeded to Subic Bay, where the Americans occupied Olongapo, at the base of the Bataan Peninsula, on 30th January, and carried out surveys and marked wrecks. They continued this work until the survey was completed on 19th February, landing armed parties to erect survey marks as required. H.M.A.S. *Cape Leeuwin*<sup>7</sup> visited Subic Bay during this period, and Byrne, *Warrego*'s commanding officer, recorded that "the mail which she brought

<sup>4</sup> *Conway*, *Eaton*, *Braine*, US destroyers (1942-43), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

<sup>5</sup> *Frazier*, US destroyer (1942), 1,620 tons, four 5-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

<sup>6</sup> This is the San Fernando some 20 miles north of Manila Bay, not to be confused with the town of the same name on the north-eastern extremity of Lingayen Gulf, which was bombarded by *Australia* and *Shropshire* on 6th January.

<sup>7</sup> HMAS *Cape Leeuwin*, tender (1943), 1,406 tons.

from Leyte, and the fresh provisions (enough for four days) made life more interesting, particularly as prunes and rice formed the last meal prior to this happy event".

Meanwhile events were put in train for the capture of Manila. After the Zambales and Subic Bay landings, a third was made at Nasugbu, south of Manila Bay, on 31st January. Attacked by land from the north, Manila was entered in the evening of 3rd February. The Japanese defenders, however, fought to the end, and not until 4th March was the city cleared of the enemy. "By that time it was a shambles—a more complete picture of destruction than Cologne, Hamburg or the City of London."<sup>8</sup>

While fighting for Manila was in progress, Corregidor was assaulted, with Admiral Struble in command of the assault forces. Berkey commanded the support group which bombarded targets around Mariveles, on the tip of Bataan Peninsula, Corregidor, and the small islands across the entrance to Manila Bay. There was some opposition by shore-based gunfire, and Berkey was deprived of two of his destroyers, badly damaged by mines. For the landing on 15th February, Berkey decided to call on the additional support of Commodore Farncomb and TU.77.3.5, so that Australia was represented at the Corregidor assault.

TU.77.3.5 left Lingayen Gulf at 3.25 a.m. on the 15th and arrived off Corregidor Island at midday. Berkey's group—cruisers *Denver*, *Colorado*, *Montpelier*,<sup>9</sup> *Phoenix* and *Boise*, with destroyers—was off the entrance to the bay supporting minesweepers. Three well-controlled guns on the north face of Corregidor had been causing trouble and hampering sweeping operations in the Mariveles area. Midshipman Francis, in *Shropshire*, recorded how "Thunderbolts and Bostons were making spectacular strikes against this area. The Bostons made low runs using rockets and parachute bombs. After the strikes the northern section of Corregidor was hidden in a cloud of dust and smoke."

At first light on the 16th TU.77.3.5, which had stood off to the westward for the night, was in position at the entrance to Manila Bay. *Shropshire*, *Portland* and *Minneapolis*, in line ahead, moved up the south channel and bombarded the Corregidor beach area between San Jose and Ordnance Point, on the south side of the island. *Shropshire* fired 48 rounds. The unit's destroyers, following the cruisers in line ahead, bombarded on the run out. After the bombardment Corregidor was subjected to successive heavy air attacks, and at 8.35 the first wave of army transport aircraft arrived and dropped paratroops. The parachute landings were followed during the morning by a small amphibious landing by a force from Mariveles, which the Americans had taken the previous day. TU.77.3.5 left Corregidor at 2 p.m. to return to Lingayen Gulf. "Though our role was a minor one," Commodore Farncomb commented in his Squadron Report, "we were able to witness the assault on Corregidor on 16th February."

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<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol XIII, p. 198.

<sup>9</sup> *Montpelier*, US cruiser (1942), 10,000 tons, twelve 6-in and twelve 5-in guns, three aircraft, 32½ kts.

The Japanese on the island resisted fanatically, and it was 26th February before most of the island was cleared. Its capture cost the invaders 225 killed and missing, and 645 wounded and injured in parachute drops. More than 4,500 Japanese dead were counted, and it was estimated that an additional 700 were killed.

#### IV

There was progress against the Axis enemies elsewhere during February. In the Pacific, Admiral Spruance's first task after taking over as Commander-in-Chief Fifth Fleet was to conduct the naval side of the capture of Iwo Jima. This island had, for some seven months, been subjected to aerial and surface bombardment by the Americans, to reduce its value as an air base and to destroy the defences. Before the landing it was bombed daily for more than 70 days. As a preliminary to the assault Fifth Fleet's TF.58, on 16th and 17th February, carried out heavy raids on Tokyo and other targets in Japan proper—the first such carrier strike since the Halsey-Doolittle raid of 1942.

The assault and support forces, under Rear-Admiral W. H. P. Blandy, U.S.N., arrived off Iwo Jima at 6 a.m. on 16th February. Minesweeping began at 6.45, and the surface bombardment by TF.54, of 6 battleships, 4 heavy cruisers, a light cruiser and 16 destroyers, just after 7 a.m. The island was subjected to bombardment throughout the day whenever spotting aircraft could observe the fall of shot. Bombardment, and the beach reconnaissance parties' activities next day convinced the Japanese commander, Lieut-General Kuribayashi, that the main landing—scheduled for 19th February—had started, and caused him to unmask concealed batteries. Thus the Americans were able to make their bombardment on the 18th most effective, the battleships closing in and delivering direct fire all day. The bombardment, which lasted until 6.21 p.m., was largely responsible for the assault teams at next day's landings escaping with few casualties.

Admiral Turner—who had come a long way since Guadalcanal—commanded the landing, made in still weather with a calm sea, after "the heaviest pre-H-hour bombardment of World War II"<sup>1</sup> delivered by 7 battleships, 4 heavy cruisers, 3 light cruisers and (during the last half hour) 10 destroyers. The island was also struck fiercely by aircraft with rockets, bombs and napalm. The first assault wave left the line of departure at 8.30 a.m., and the initial landing was on time at 9 o'clock, with the remaining assault waves landing on schedule within the next 23 minutes. Once on shore the attackers came up against the obstacles of terrain—terraces of volcanic ash and cinders—and Japanese opposition, with heavy fire from covered and protected positions.

Continuous naval gunfire supported the invaders, of whom approximately 30,000 were landed on the 19th, and of whom on that day 2,420 were casualties, including 566 killed, missing or died of wounds. Progress fell short of

<sup>1</sup> Morison, *Victory in the Pacific* (1960), p. 34, Vol XIV in the series.

<sup>2</sup> Morison, Vol XIV, p. 47.

expectations. "The reduction and capture of Iwo Jima," wrote the American naval historian,<sup>2</sup> "is a story of yard-by-yard advance against a tough, resourceful enemy who allowed no let-up, and who so used his terrain as to exact the maximum price in blood." Iwo Jima was declared "secured" at 6 p.m. on 16th March, and "operation completed" at 8 a.m. on the 26th. But after that date there was still mopping up to be done. Up to and including 26th March, the Americans lost 6,812 killed, missing and died of wounds, of whom 5,931 were marines and 881 navy. The count of Japanese killed and sealed up in caves was 20,703. Only 216 were taken prisoners.

Thus the Allies moved a step nearer to the home base of the enemy in the Pacific. Iwo Jima was wanted as a base for long-range fighter escorts for strikes on Japan. But by the time it could be used in that way Japanese air strength in the home islands was dwindling so rapidly that bombers were going out unescorted, while the use of B-29's in night missions also reduced the need for fighters. Iwo Jima did, however, come into its own as an intermediate landing ground, particularly for bombers in distress, and by the end of the war 2,400 B-29's, with crews aggregating 25,000, had made emergency landings on the island. Admiral King, in his final Official Report to the Secretary of the Navy, said: "It is estimated that the lives saved through this latter factor alone, subsequent to the capture of Iwo Jima, exceeded the lives lost in the capture itself."

Farther afield other Allied assaults were tightening the ring around Japan, and were battering at the home base of the European enemy. In Burma British troops crossed the Irrawaddy at a point 35 miles west of Mandalay. And on 1st February American aircraft dropped 179 tons of bombs on Singapore. A few days later the Japanese withdrew *Ise* and *Hyuga* from Singapore. They were sighted by aircraft on 15th February about 50 miles E.N.E. of Amoy, heading north-east accompanied by a heavy cruiser and seven destroyers. Unfortunately the weather prevented a major air strike against them. (From 13th to 15th February, H.M.A. Ships *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, as TU.77.3.15, proceeded from Lingayen Gulf to a position about 300 miles west of Manila to be prepared for rescue work "when an air strike on a Japanese Task Group proceeding north along the Indo-China coast had been arranged".<sup>3</sup>)

In Europe the Allies had launched a full-scale attack against Hitler's West Wall defences, and the Russians, closing in on Germany, had reached positions 66 miles east of Dresden, 57 miles south of Danzig and 20 miles east of Stettin. February saw, too, additional nations align themselves with the Allies in declarations of war against the Axis Powers. At a conference at Yalta that month the Allies decided that those from among the countries qualified as associated nations who declared war on the Axis Powers before 1st March 1945 would be invited to take part in the San Francisco Conference to be held in April. The partner nations mentioned were Turkey, Egypt, Iceland, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru,

<sup>2</sup> R.A.N. Squadron Report, February 1945.



Uruguay and Venezuela. Turkey declared war on the Axis Powers on 23rd February. Next day Egypt declared war similarly—and after making the declaration in the Chamber of Deputies the Prime Minister, Ahmed Maher, was assassinated. Syria declared war on Germany and Japan on the 20th, and the Lebanon made a similar declaration.

## V

While the Iwo Jima operation was in progress, the clearing of the Japanese from the southern Philippines continued. To secure control of the straits leading into the central Philippine waters in order to cut off enemy reinforcements and facilitate reduction of the remaining enemy strongholds in the islands, several landings were necessary. By now the Japanese remaining in the islands—which were garrisoned by the XXXV Army under Lieut-General Suzuki, who had defended Leyte—had little or no air support and negligible possibilities of reinforcement.

In the south-west Palawan was seized by the Americans on 28th February. The landing, under the command of Rear-Admiral Fechteler, was staged from Mindoro and was preceded by two days' air strike and a pre-landing bombardment by a force of three light cruisers and four destroyers. There was no opposition to the landing. The capture of Palawan provided an effective barrier on the west, and a base for naval and air operations which controlled the Balabac Strait—between Palawan and North Borneo—and thus the entrance from the South China Sea to the Sulu Sea. It also offered air bases for use in the forthcoming attack on Borneo. On 4th March Burias and Ticao Islands were seized, and on the 12th Romblon and Simara, these providing protection for shipping proceeding through San Bernardino Strait.

On 10th March landings were made at Zamboanga, on the southern tip of the island of Mindanao, and Australia participated in this operation through the activities of *Warrego*. On 2nd March she arrived at Mindoro after carrying out the Subic Bay survey, and there Commander Oom, as CTG.70.5, Survey and Hydrographic Group, and the ship's commanding officer, Lieutenant Byrne, received orders from Rear-Admiral Royal, commanding the Zamboanga operation, to stand by to participate. *Warrego* eventually left Mindoro in the afternoon of 6th March with a convoy of 15 motor minesweepers and seven landing craft to which she formed part of the screen, with U.S. destroyers *Taylor* and *Nicholas*. At 7.55 a.m. on the 8th the convoy, now joined by Berkeley's support group of *Phoenix* and *Boise* and 15 destroyers, arrived in the vicinity of the Santa Cruz Islands, Basilan Strait. The minesweepers proceeded to clear the area outside the islands while 12 Liberator aircraft bombed the area in the vicinity of the landing beaches, and Berkeley's support group bombarded. *Warrego* set course to start placing beacons and buoys. "This necessitated crossing the unswept Santa Cruz Bank which was to be the anchorage for the fleet when it arrived. Lower deck was cleared and ship battened down, hands being at action stations. The first beacon was laid at 1505."

Next morning when *Warrego* was continuing sounding the Santa Cruz anchorage—steaming on one engine while repairs were effected to a blown steam joint—a shore battery opened fire on her, the first shells landing 30 to 50 yards astern. Full speed was ordered and the ship made for a break in the reef, while she replied to the Japanese with her 4-inch guns.

Shells continued to straddle the ship, approximately twenty short and five over, very close. Some fragments came inboard and Able Seaman G. Gross,<sup>4</sup> breech worker of No. 1 right gun, and the C.O., Lieutenant Byrne, who was on the port wing of the bridge, received slight wounds. Shrapnel was flying rather freely, and CTG.70.5 and two other officers had narrow escapes. Director was quickly on the target and the shore battery went out of business after four salvoes. Ship received no damage but was extremely sluggish on one engine. Ceased fire at 0931, after firing 26 rounds of 4-inch.<sup>5</sup>

The landing beaches were again subjected to aerial and surface bombardments on the morning of the 9th. During the afternoon *Warrego* lowered "the ancient survey boat *Alert* and 25-foot motor-boat *Blowfly*", loaded with dan buoys and flags to mark the approach lanes for the morrow's landings. There was spasmodic fire from the enemy batteries in the foothills at the back of the beach, and the boats' parties—commanded by Sub-Lieutenant Cole<sup>6</sup> who had with him an American lieutenant (J.G.) in each boat—were armed with Bren guns, Tommy-guns, and rifles, while seven L.C.S. (Landing Craft Support), with rockets and Bofors guns, provided support fire from the flanks.

*Warrego* was again under fire from the shore battery, and at 6.59 p.m., *Alert*, while completing the inshore sounding of the last lane, was struck by incendiary and explosive bullets from the shore, and set on fire forward. *Blowfly* turned inshore to her assistance, when *Alert*

slowly backed off (she was in very shallow water a few feet from the beach) and headed for the ship, reporting by RT two seriously wounded, damage to the echo gear, and a hole in the petrol tank which caused loss of pressure and resulted in very slow speed until AB Tremethick<sup>7</sup> plugged the hole with his finger and worked the force feed pump by hand.

Next morning the invasion convoy arrived, and the landing was carried out after "a terrific aerial bombing commenced by Liberator aircraft, which was joined in by the cruisers and destroyers". *Warrego* and *Alert* and *Blowfly* continued their work, the two boats placing marker buoys for the L.S.T's. Admiral Royal stated "that he was delighted with the job done by *Warrego*, which he classed as 100 per cent".

The clearing of the southern Visayas was the next task on the list, and this envisaged the liberation from the Japanese of the islands of

<sup>4</sup> AB G. Gross, PA3678; HMAS *Warrego*. Of Adelaide; b. Maylands, WA, 22 Sep 1924.

<sup>5</sup> *Warrego*, "Interim Letter of Proceedings", 1st to 11th March 1945.

<sup>6</sup> Sub-Lt D. L. Cole, DSC; RANR. HMAS *Warrego*. Student; of Elwood, Vic; b. Melbourne, 30 Apr 1925.

<sup>7</sup> AB R. M. Tremethick, PA1533. HMAS's *Hobart* and *Warrego*. Of Adelaide; b. Bordertown, SA, 21 Oct 1919.

Panay, Cebu, Negros and Bohol. Operation VICTOR 1 included a landing on Panay to be followed by the occupation of "Negros Occidental"—the north-west part of that island. Target date for Panay was 18th March, with Rear-Admiral Struble as Attack Group Commander. *Warrego* was designated as Senior Officer of the Mindoro echelon of the attack force, and sailed from Mindoro at 5.45 p.m. on 16th March with 37 landing and other craft, and joined up with the main body from Lingayen Gulf north of Mindoro that night.

The landing, at 9.30 a.m. on 18th March on two sets of beaches on the south coast of Panay about 12 miles west of the provincial capital, Iloilo, was preceded at first light by a mine clearance sweep inshore, with *Warrego* as mine destruction vessel. *Warrego* then proceeded with her "marking" duties, and placed the first channel buoy at 10.14 a.m. She spent the next two or three days surveying in the area, and in the Iloilo River and approaches, thus enabling L.S.T's to proceed up river, and Liberty ships to berth alongside the pier at the river mouth. On the 24th and 25th she surveyed the approaches to the proposed landing beach on Negros Island. The Americans on Panay entered Iloilo on 20th March, and the Negros landing was carried out on the 29th. The Japanese offered no opposition to the landing, and no naval support was needed thereat. But hard fighting developed inland and continued until 4th June, when the remaining enemy withdrew deep into the unexplored mountains.

## VI

After partaking, even though in a minor role, in the attack on Corregidor on 16th February, TU.77.3.5 arrived back in Lingayen Gulf on the 17th, and on the 26th sailed for Leyte. There the combined Australian-American group disbanded, and on 1st March the Australian ships—*Shropshire*, *Arunta* and *Warramunga*—sailed for Manus. The two first-mentioned were to proceed to Australia for a refit, but in the meantime they were replaced in the South-West Pacific by *Hobart* (Captain Dowling) which was one of the few ships in Seeadler Harbour when they reached there on 5th March.

After being torpedoed off the Solomons in July 1943, *Hobart* was in dockyard hands in Sydney until December 1944. She recommissioned on 7th December and after shakedown cruises and exercises left Sydney on 6th February for Manus. During the five days she was there exercising with her Australian fellows before the departure of *Shropshire* and *Arunta* for Australia, the British Pacific Fleet of battleships, aircraft carriers, and screening cruisers and destroyers—including the Australian ships *Quickmatch* and *Quiberon*—arrived in Seeadler Harbour. Alliston, in *Warramunga*, recorded that

they made an inspiring sight and I think all hands were genuinely pleased to see them. A considerable amount of ship visiting developed from this meeting and from all sides one heard glowing accounts of the hospitality with which the R.N. had been welcomed in Australia.

On 10th March the Australian ships parted company. *Shropshire* and *Arunta* proceeded for Sydney, where they arrived on 16th March, while *Hobart* and *Warramunga* sailed together for Leyte, to take part in the Cebu operation at the end of the month.

In this operation the Australian ships were with Admiral Berkeley's TG.74.3, the Covering and Support Group, comprising *Phoenix* and *Hobart*, and destroyers *Nicholas*, *Taylor*, *O'Bannon* and *Warramunga*. The landing beach on Cebu—the long, narrow island which lies snugly between Negros Island to the west and Bohol Island to the east, with its 115 miles long main axis running N.N.E./S.S.W.—was near Talisay, about four miles west of Cebu City, midway along the east coast of the island. The landing was made on 26th March, and the first wave touched down at 8.28 a.m., the others following at three-minute intervals. TG.74.3 delivered a pre-landing bombardment of an hour and a half, though *Warramunga* was assigned the task of patrolling Hibutangen Channel on the right flank of the attack forces, so that she “was not given a bombardment task—much to the disappointment of all hands”. The destroyer had an uneventful time, but those on board enjoyed an excellent view of the landing and bombardment.

The Japanese could be seen carrying out extensive demolitions in the city [Cebu] and firing 20mm and 40mm guns at the strafing and bombing B25's and B24's. On several occasions “overs” from this fire fell around the ship but no damage was done.

*Hobart* fired at a suspected mortar site during her bombardment, but the U.S. naval historian remarks<sup>8</sup> that “there seems to have been no enemy gunfire of any kind at the water's edge”, though the landing parties—of the Americal Division which had won its spurs on Guadalcanal—were held by land mines from 8.30 to 10 a.m. It was apparently the explosions of these mines which were taken by those in the ships to be enemy mortar fire. Once past the beach minefield at 10 o'clock, the troops started a cautious advance through abandoned Japanese defence positions. Cebu City was entered by the Americans on 27th March, and they found it systematically destroyed by the Japanese. Later the invaders were opposed by the enemy in prepared positions and strongpoints, and the Japanese were not forced out of the last of these until 12th April. The survivors retreated into the mountains in the north of the island, where they were no longer a menace. The liberation of Cebu Island cost the American Army 410 killed and 1,700 wounded, with a few naval casualties. The Japanese lost some 5,500 killed, and at the end of the war 8,500—including three generals and an admiral—surrendered.

## VII

In the early morning of 26th March, when *Hobart* and *Warramunga* were at the Cebu landing, the British Pacific Fleet—now designated TF.57—was engaged in its first operation against the Japanese in the South-West Pacific, supporting the Americans in their invasion of the island of

<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol. XIII, p. 235.

Okinawa. Its task was to neutralise the aerodromes and landing strips on the islands of Ishigaki and Miyako, lying in the group known as the Sakishima Gunto to the south-west of Okinawa, between that island and Formosa.

The fleet sailed from Sydney for Manus on 28th February. It comprised the battleships *King George V* (Flagship of Vice-Admiral Rawlings) and *Howe*; the four fleet carriers *Indomitable* (Flagship of Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Vian), *Victorious*, *Illustrious* and *Indefatigable*; the 4th Cruiser Squadron of four ships; and the 25th, 4th, and 27th Destroyer Flotillas, comprising the light cruiser *Euryalus* (Flagship of R.A.(D), Rear-Admiral J. H. Edelsten), and 12 destroyers. H.M.A. Ships *Quickmatch* (Commander Becher) and *Quiberon* (Lieut-Commander Knox<sup>9</sup>) were in the 4th Flotilla, of which *Quickmatch* was leader,<sup>1</sup> with Captain R. G. Onslow, R.N., Captain (D), and staff on board.

At Manus the fleet spent eleven days exercising at sea, and on 18th March sailed for Ulithi, where it arrived on the 20th. On the 23rd, on its assignment to the American Fifth Fleet, it became Task Force 57. As such it sailed from Ulithi at 6.30 a.m. on the 25th, and forty-eight hours later met the tanker group about 480 miles south of Okinawa and refuelled.

Operation ICEBERG, as the Okinawa operation was designated, was described by British observers as "the most audacious and complex enterprise yet undertaken by the American amphibious forces".<sup>2</sup> It was designed to secure a forward base for the bombing of Japan, and an assembly area for the troops destined to invade that country later in the year. The four principal American commanders were Admiral Spruance, Vice-Admiral Mitscher, CTF.58, Vice-Admiral Turner, in charge of the assault until the beach-head was established, and Lieut-General S. B. Buckner, commanding the Tenth Army. Plans allowed for the eventual landing on Okinawa of some 172,000 combatant and 115,000 service troops. Japanese ground troops on the island numbered about 77,000, constituting the XXXII Army, commanded by Lieut-General Mitsuru Ushijima.

Control of the air by the Americans in the operation was maintained with the use of numerous air forces. The Twentieth Air Force, operating from India and Ceylon and the Marianas, carried out raids on Formosa and on Japan, designed to destroy the enemy's aerial offensive capacity and compel him to retain fighters for home defence. The Fast Carrier Force, TF.58, launched fighter sweeps against the Kyushu airfields, and shared with Fifth Fleet escort carriers the tactical support of the operation until the Okinawa airfields could be rendered inoperative. During the first two months of the campaign TF.57 covered the American left flank by

<sup>9</sup> Cdr G. F. E. Knox, RAN. HMS *Kandahar*; comd HMAS's *Orara* 1943-44, *Quiberon* 1945. B. Sydney, 20 Aug 1913.

<sup>1</sup> In the absence of HMS *Quilliam*, refitting in Sydney.

<sup>2</sup> Morison, Vol XIV, p. 86.

neutralising the airfields of the Sakishima Islands, alternating, whilst fueling, with the escort carriers of the Amphibious Support Force. MacArthur's air forces were assigned the task of attacking and neutralising the enemy airfields in Formosa, the strongest and best developed Japanese base south of the home islands.

As Commander Fifth Fleet, Admiral Spruance himself commanded the Covering Force, TF.50. Under its shelter Vice-Admiral Turner's Joint Expeditionary Force, TF.51, carried out the assault of Okinawa and the other needed islands of the Ryukyus. The Tenth Army consisted of III Amphibious Corps and the XXIV Corps, organised as a Northern and Southern Attack Force. As a protection against a raiding Japanese fleet was TF.54, of 10 older battleships, 13 cruisers and 29 destroyers and destroyer escorts. This force also supplemented the Amphibious Support Force, TF.52, for bombardment purposes. TF.52 contained the mine-sweepers and underwater demolition teams, and 14 escort carriers, whose primary duty was to furnish air support at Okinawa.

Four days before the British Fleet sailed from Manus, the Fast Carrier Force, TF.58, sailed from Ulithi on 14th March to carry out air strikes against airfields in southern Japan. This it did between the 18th and 22nd, during which period it was claimed that 528 Japanese aircraft were destroyed. The Japanese admitted that losses were staggering. These losses prevented heavy participation by Japanese air forces in the defence of Okinawa until 6th April. The Americans did not get off scatheless, carriers *Intrepid*, *Enterprise*, *Yorktown* and *Wasp* were damaged by bombs in varying degree, and suffered casualties. *Franklin* was hit by two bombs which set her on fire and exploded bombs and ammunition, and, suffering 724 killed or missing and 265 wounded, she had to retire. By Herculean efforts and dauntless courage, she was saved to return to the United States under her own power.

At daylight on 26th March TF.57 was in its flying off position, about 80 miles south of Miyako, and during the morning and afternoon strikes were flown off to attack the airfield targets in the Sakishima Islands. *Quiberon* recorded that "although the fleet was brought to five minutes notice for air attack on three occasions . . . no hostile aircraft were sighted". It was fortunate that, during operation ICEBERG, the British Pacific Fleet was faced with a scale of air attack which was weak by Pacific standards. The ships were inadequately armed with anti-aircraft guns. Their armament had been designed primarily to fight ships. Suicide air attacks introduced new complications, since they proved invulnerable to anything smaller than 40-mm guns, and the British Fleet was largely equipped with the 20-mm gun, which had proved effective against torpedo bombers.<sup>3</sup> But the British carriers had the advantage over their American counterparts in one particular—their armoured decks. Suicide aircraft inflicted

<sup>3</sup> Writing of the British ships in Seadler Harbour on 7th March, Midshipman Francis in *Shropshire* observed: "When we entered harbour at 1730 and passed through portion of the Eleventh Fleet lying at anchor, I noticed that the close range armament on the cruisers and destroyers left a lot to be desired."

on the British carriers a higher percentage of hits than on the American fast carriers. Whereas the British shared five hits among four carriers, the Americans shared five hits among fifteen carriers. But, while every American carrier which was hit by a *Kamikaze* had to withdraw to a navy yard for repairs, all the British carriers, when hit, remained operational.

TF.57 continued its air strikes on the 27th, and after dark retired to refuel. "These two days' operations," remarked Becher in *Quickmatch's* report, "were successful, the enemy airstrips being neutralised and a number of aircraft being destroyed on the ground." Meanwhile, on the 27th aircraft of the Twentieth Air Force attacked the Kyushu air bases, and repeated the operation on the 31st. By then TF.57 was back in its launching area after refuelling, and its air strikes on the Sakishima group were resumed.

### VIII

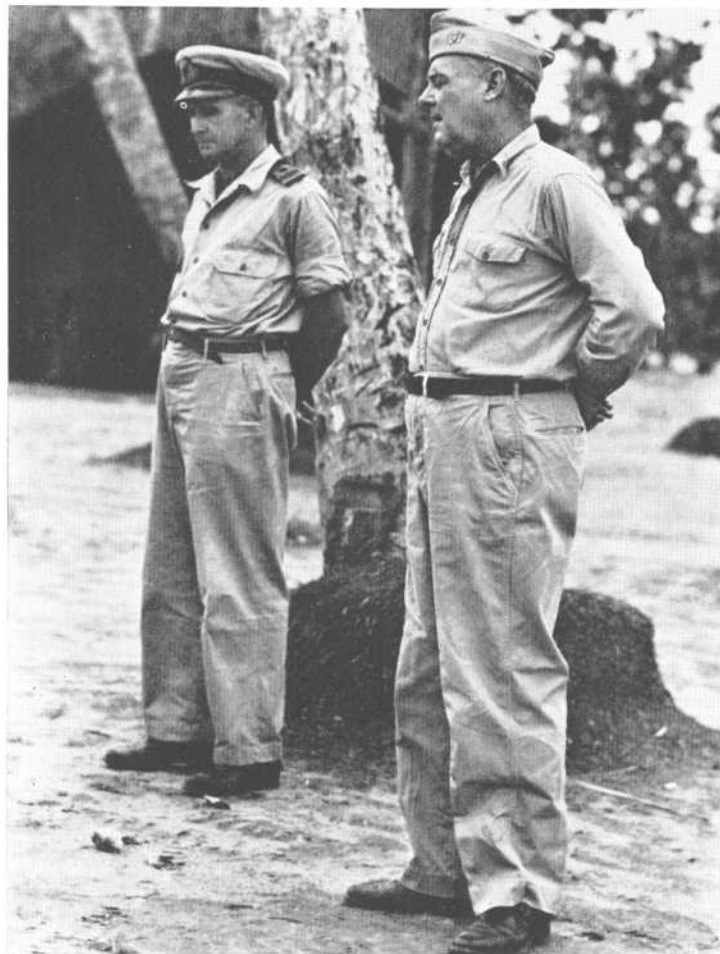
The main landings on Okinawa were scheduled for 1st April but, coincidentally with the opening air attack by TF.57 on 26th March, landings were made on the Kerama Islands, a small mountainous group lying some fifteen miles west of Okinawa's southern extremity. The capture of this group was decided upon to provide a harbour for fuelling and ammunitioning during the Okinawa operation. By late afternoon on 28th March the group of eight islands was secured. "On 31 March when the writer entered Kerama Kaikyo on board *Tennessee*, the roadstead already had the appearance of a long-established base, and 35 vessels were anchored there."<sup>4</sup>

At 8.32 next morning, Easter Sunday, 1st April 1945, the first wave of American invaders landed on Okinawa. The landings were made on the 10-mile strip of beaches extending south from Zampa Point, on the west coast and opposite the important Yontan and Kadena airfields. The landing followed some days of minesweeping and aerial and surface bombardment, and a tremendous pre-landing pounding of the beach area by the battleships and cruisers of the fire support ships. Landing was unopposed by land forces, and within an hour 16,000 men were on shore. Within an hour and a half the Marines were on the edge of Yontan airfield, and had suffered no casualties; and at 10 a.m. both Yontan and Kadena airfields were in American hands. Unloading went on throughout the afternoon without impediment from the enemy. At 4 p.m. Admiral Turner reported: "Landings on all beaches continued, with good progress inland against light opposition. Beach-head has been secured. . . . Approximately 50,000 troops have landed on beaches."

On the day of the Okinawa landings TF.57 experienced its first air attack during which a *Kamikaze* crashed the base of *Indefatigable's* island, causing some fatal casualties. Her flight deck was only briefly out of action and she continued to launch and recover aircraft. The destroyer *Ulster*<sup>5</sup>

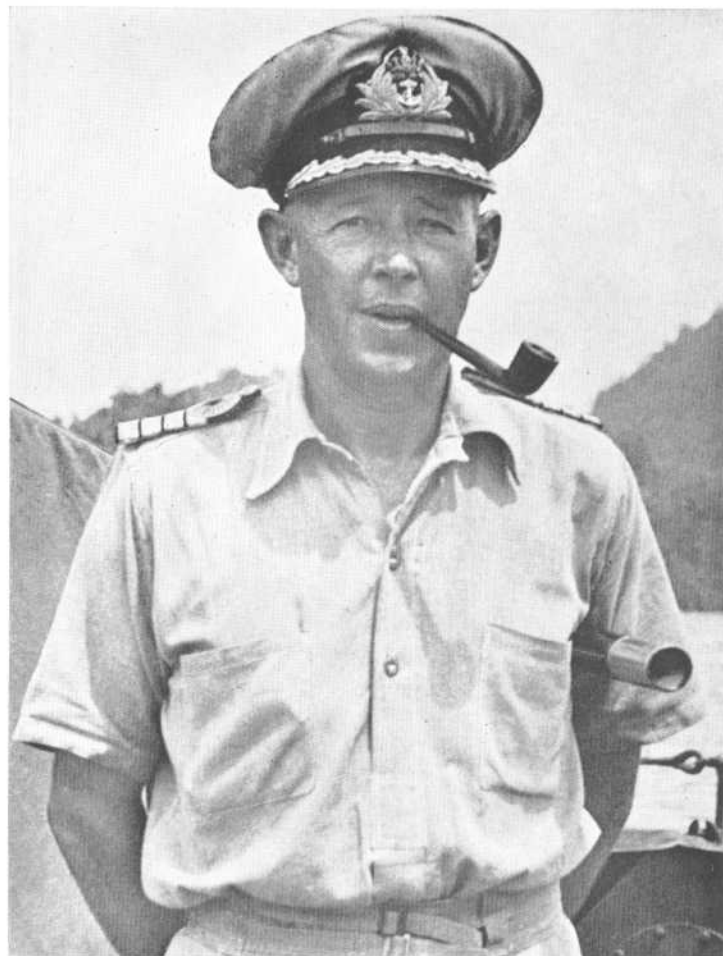
<sup>4</sup> Morison, Vol XIV, p. 127.

<sup>5</sup> HMS *Ulster*, destroyer (1942), 1,710 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Lieut-Commander E. A. Feldt, N.O.I.C. Torokina (left), takes over from Commander E. H. Kincaid, U.S.N., in February 1945.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

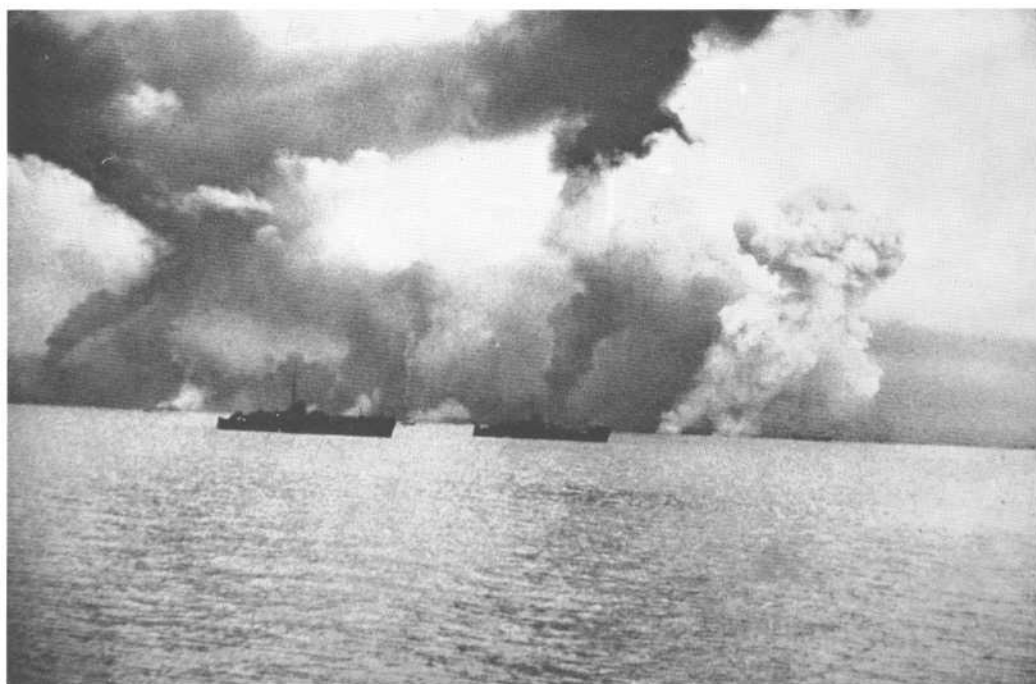
Captain R. R. Dowling, H.M.A.S. *Hobart*, after the Wewak bombardment, 10th May 1945.





*(Department of Information)*

Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, Commander-in-Chief, British Pacific Fleet, with Vice-Admiral C. S. Daniel, Commanding the 1st Battle Squadron.



*(Netherlands I.G. Information Service)*

Tarakan, 1st May 1945. Destroyers silhouetted against smoke from burning shore installations.



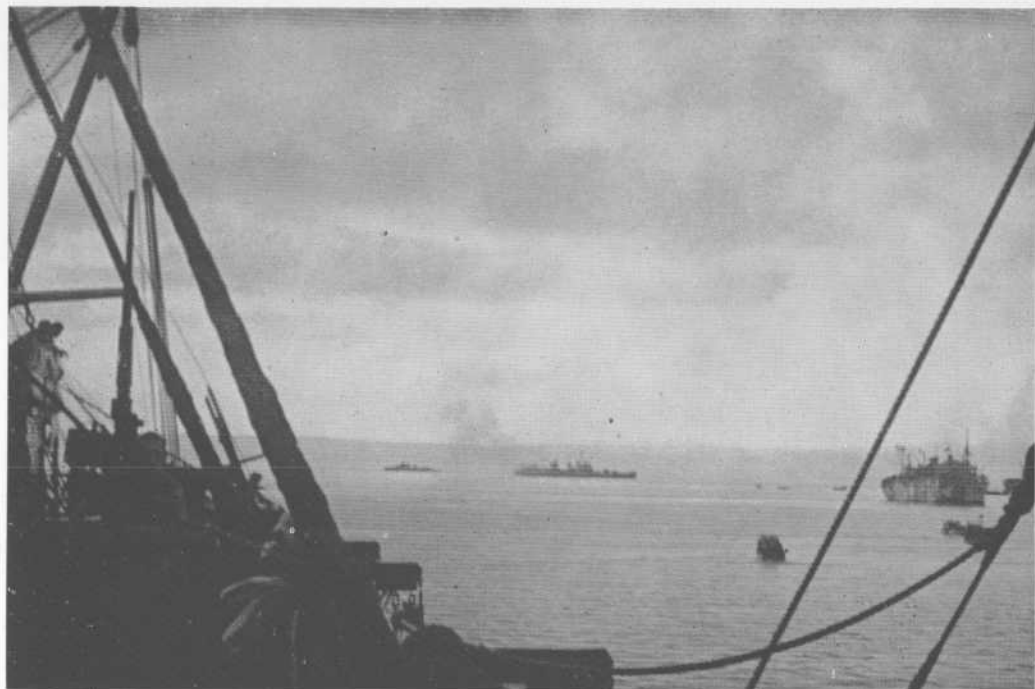
*(Argus, Melbourne)*

Admiral Sir Louis Hamilton, First Naval Member and Chief of Australian Naval Staff from June 1945.



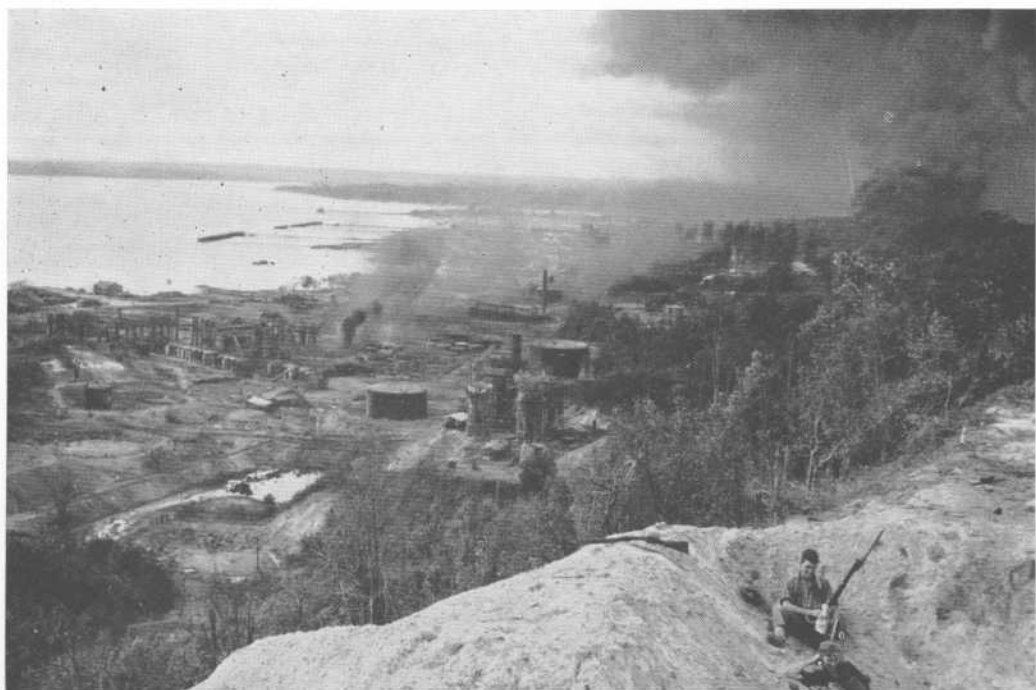
*(R.A.N. Historical Section)*

Commander R. B. M. Long, Director of Naval Intelligence.



(Naval Historical Section)

Landing ships preparing to disembark troops, while the U.S.S. *Phoenix* bombards shore installations at Labuan Island, 10th June 1945. This picture was taken from H.M.A.S. *Westralia*.



(Netherlands I.G. Information Service)

Balikpapan, after the township had been captured by Australian troops, two of whom are seen resting in the foreground. July 1945.

was damaged by a near-miss bomb, and was towed to Leyte. Throughout April the force alternated with periods in the combat area and periods refuelling. The main strikes were against Ishigaki and Miyako, but on 12th and 13th April, as detailed by Admiral Spruance, TF.57 supplemented the efforts of Allied Air Forces, South-West Pacific Area by raiding Shinchiku and Matsuyama airfields in the northern part of Formosa. This entailed moving the flying-off position to the westward to a point some 50 miles east of Formosa. There followed two more periods of air strikes against the islands in the Sakishima group, and on 21st April TF.57 retired to Leyte for a short replenishment. There, after two months in *Quickmatch*, Captain Onslow and his staff rejoined *Quilliam*, which resumed as Flotilla Leader. Of the month, Becher reported:

The airstrikes were successful in neutralising the enemy aerodromes concerned. The Fleet was occasionally threatened by aircraft but fighter interception was usually so effective that the enemy were driven off or shot down before making contact. Minor damage to two carriers was caused by aircraft which got through. A dull time was had by *Quickmatch* and the excellent air warning meant that the operational periods were in no way arduous.

In the final phase of its April operations against the Sakishima group, TF.57 was joined by three more Australian ships, *Napier*, *Nepal* and *Norman* of the 7th Flotilla. The four ships of the flotilla—including *Nizam*—had sailed from Sydney at the beginning of April and reached Manus on the 7th and 8th of the month. They sailed thence in two groups—*Napier/Nepal* and *Norman/Nizam*—escorting two convoys to Leyte, where they arrived respectively on 15th and 13th April. *Nizam* was detained at Leyte with engine defects, but at daylight on the 18th the other three ships of the flotilla joined TF.57 in position “Mosquito”—the replenishment area south of the Sakishima group, where was the refuelling group, TU.112.2.5—and sailed with it when it returned to the flying-off position on 19th April.

They formed part of the screen during the airstrikes against Ishigaki and Miyako on the 20th. The first strikes were flown off at 6.30, and Plunkett-Cole in *Norman* recorded that “from that time onwards aircraft were landing and taking off almost continuously. . . . Flying operations were completed at 1900 and TF.57 then shaped course to withdraw from the area.” The force retired to San Pedro Bay, Leyte, where it arrived on the 23rd and remained until the end of the month.

## IX

While TF.57 enjoyed comparative freedom from enemy air attack during the April operations against the Sakishima group airfields and *Quickmatch* had “a dull time”, the Americans suffered heavily from a new form of Japanese *Kamikaze* attack. The effectiveness of these attacks in the Philippines campaign decided the Japanese to set up an organisation to exploit suicide tactics, and to make the *Kamikaze* attack no longer a voluntary act but compulsory upon the pilots ordered to carry it out. They thus had

sufficient numbers of *Kamikazes* to organise mass suicide attacks and these, under the name of *Kikusui* (floating chrysanthemums), they now brought into operation. Simultaneously with the delivery of the first *Kikusui* attack, they committed the remnants of the Japanese Navy—the giant battleship *Yamato* (Flag of Vice-Admiral Ito), light cruiser *Yahagi* and eight destroyers—to “destroy the enemy convoy and task force around Okinawa”, in cooperation with the Japanese Air Forces and Army.

The first of the ten *Kikusui* attacks carried out by the Japanese during the Okinawa campaign was on 6th April. A total of 896 enemy aircraft took part, 355 *Kamikaze* planes and 341 bombers. In this, as in later *Kikusui* attacks, the American radar picket destroyers and other vessels suffered severely. Attacks began during the afternoon and the Americans lost three destroyers, one L.S.T. and two ammunition ships. Ten ships, including eight destroyers, a destroyer-escort and a minelayer, suffered major damage and many casualties. Claims of enemy aircraft destroyed amounted to about 350.

Some two-and-a-half hours after the air attacks began TF.58 received enemy reports from the submarines *Threadfin* and *Hackleback*,<sup>6</sup> patrolling off the Bungo Strait entrance to the Inland Sea. The “two large and about six smaller” ships they had sighted were *Yamato* and her companions, steaming south-west at 25 knots. The objective of the force was the Hagushi roadstead off Okinawa, to attack survivors of the *Kikusui* attack. They were the only ships which, in the lack of effective units and the dearth of oil, could put to sea on such a mission. That it was sacrificial is indicated by the fact that *Yamato* was given enough fuel for a one-way passage to Okinawa.<sup>7</sup>

The wheel had turned full circle. In July 1941 Japan was hamstrung by the refusal of the Netherlands East Indies to meet her demands for oil, and by American, British and Dutch freezing of her assets when she occupied Indo-China. At a meeting of the Japanese Supreme War Council, presided over by the Emperor, on 6th September 1941, “Admiral Nagano likened Japan to a patient who was certain to die if nothing was done, but might be saved by a dangerous operation”.<sup>8</sup> By the “dangerous operation” Japan had recouped herself with Netherlands East Indies oil and other products. But now the reaction to the “dangerous operation” had set in. The sources of nutrition had been cut off, and the “patient who was certain to die” was *in extremis*.

The Japanese forces got under way from off Tokuyama—on the Inland Sea due north of Bungo Strait—at 3.20 p.m. on the 6th. On the first stage of its passage

<sup>6</sup> *Threadfin* and *Hackleback*, US submarines (1944), 1,526 tons, one gun (3- to 5-in), ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 20 kts.

<sup>7</sup> Rear-Admiral Yokoi in US Naval Institute *Proceedings* LXXX 509. Quoted in Morison, Vol XIV, p. 200. Captain Andrieu D'Albas, in *Death of a Navy* (1957), p. 214, says: “Fuel was so scarce that when refuelling was ended it was plain that the *Yamato* could go as far as Okinawa to fight, but that she had not enough fuel to return.”

<sup>8</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, p. 441.

the little squadron navigated between the islets of the Inner Sea and there unrolled before the Japanese sailors, as if specially prepared for them, a charming vista of their motherland. In the depths of gracious bays, surrounded by tall crags, nestled fishing villages and little wooden houses with their panes of paper in ordered ranks above the beach. On the sand boats were drawn up and women with their heads swathed in white scarves waved encouragement to the warships. The pines spread their branches like parasols over the cliffs, home of the sacred heron.<sup>9</sup>

The force passed through Bungo Strait at 8 p.m., when it was sighted by *Threadfin* and *Hackleback*. It skirted the east coast of Kyushu, turned west through the strait separating that island from the most northerly of the Ryukyus, and then steered W.N.W. Ito planned to circle round to the westward and pounce on Okinawa during the evening of 7th April.

On receiving the submarines' reports, Admiral Mitscher concentrated all four of his carrier task groups in a launching position north-east of Okinawa. Searches were flown at daybreak on the 7th, and at 8.20 a.m. an aircraft from *Essex*<sup>1</sup> sighted Ito's group south-west of the Koshiki Islands, off Kyushu's west coast. From that position Ito's force made frequent radical changes of course, but the general trend was to the southward. Meanwhile the force—now lacking the small air cover which it had until 10 a.m. on the 7th—was picked up by two amphibious marine aircraft based at the Kerama Islands. They shadowed it for five hours, and homed striking aircraft on to the target.

The first strike groups reached the enemy about 12.30 p.m. on the 7th, and at 12.41 *Yamato* received two bomb hits near the mainmast. At 12.45 she suffered her first torpedo hit. In this attack the destroyer *Hamakaze* was sunk, and *Yahagi* was hit by a bomb and torpedo. For one-and-a-half hours the Japanese ships were under almost continuous attack from the American carrier-borne aircraft. Within seven minutes—from 1.37 to 1.44 p.m.—*Yamato* was struck by five torpedoes on the port side. She

began to list alarmingly; she had to be righted at any cost. . . . The only remedy was to flood the starboard engine-room, but there was no time to think of the men below. Suddenly, with terrible force, water rushed into the compartment where several hundred men who had to be sacrificed were still at work. The battleship righted herself a little, but still not enough; and speed diminished further.<sup>2</sup>

The final attack began at 2 p.m., and the aircraft were able to make selective runs on the slowly moving, almost helpless, ship. A torpedo hit aft flooded the steering room, and with the rudder jammed hard a'port the ship, now listing 35 degrees, circled at seven knots. At 2.20 p.m. the deck was nearly vertical, and shells of the big guns skidding across the ammunition room decks and crashing the bulkheads, kindled the first of a series of explosions.

In the sea a cone, a hundred and sixty feet deep, formed and boiled round the battleship as she settled heavily. The big shells escaping from their racks fell into

<sup>9</sup> D'Albas, p. 214.

<sup>1</sup> *Essex*, US aircraft carrier (1942), 27,100 tons, twelve 5-in guns, 103 aircraft, 33 kts.

<sup>2</sup> D'Albas, p. 215.

the magazines with a dull rolling sound. Bulkheads burst in and explosions sounded in the depths of the vessel like the last beatings of an injured heart. Suddenly came a convulsive swirl, and a tongue of flame licked high into the sky to announce to Kagoshima that the *Yamato* was no more. With her died the Imperial Navy.<sup>3</sup>

With her died also Admiral Ito; the ship's captain, Rear-Admiral Ariga; and 2,486 other officers and men. Light cruiser *Yahagi* was sunk and, like *Yamato*, took heavy punishment—12 bombs and seven torpedo hits—before going down. And besides *Hamakaze*, sunk early in the fight, three other destroyers were so badly damaged that they had to be scuttled. Four destroyers managed to carry their scars back to Sasebo. In addition to the ships, the Japanese Navy lost 3,663 officers and men in this sally. American losses were 10 aircraft and 12 men.

Meanwhile the *Kamikaze* attacks continued, and just after noon on the 7th TF.58 was a victim when the aircraft carrier *Hancock* suffered two hits, one forward from a bomb and one aft from the aircraft which had carried it. *Hancock* was soon able to handle aircraft on an emergency basis, but she lost 72 men killed, and 82 wounded, and left for repairs at the next replenishment day.

As stated above, the first of ten *Kikusui* attacks carried out by the Japanese at Okinawa was on 6th and 7th April. The last was on 21st and 22nd June. In these attacks the Japanese expended 1,465 aircraft and their pilots. Together with individual *Kamikaze* attacks not included in the *Kikusui* attacks, about 1,900 suicide sorties were launched against the attacking naval forces in the Okinawa campaign. In addition there were hundreds of attacks by conventional dive bombers and torpedo aircraft. Premier targets for the *Kamikazes* were the radar picket stations—the more exposed of which were manned by two destroyers and four L.C.S's—and the vessels assigned to them suffered tremendous losses. Okinawa presented the United States with the heaviest bill in any naval campaign in the war. Thirty naval ships and craft were sunk, mostly by *Kamikaze* attack, and 368 damaged. The fleet lost 763 aircraft. Over 4,900 sailors were killed or missing in action, and an additional 4,824 were wounded.<sup>4</sup> The last *Kamikaze* attack at Okinawa was in the early hours of 30th July, when an ancient aircraft of fabric and wood crashed the destroyer *Cassin Young*,<sup>5</sup> killing 17 and wounding 75 of her ship's company. By then the Okinawa campaign had been "officially declared to be over" for 28 days. But mopping up was still going on when the Japanese commander of the hitherto uninvaded islands of the Ryukyus formally surrendered the group on 7th September.

Regarding the *Kamikaze* attacks, Captain Andrieu D'Albas wrote:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> D'Albas, pp. 216-17.

<sup>4</sup> Morison, Vol XIV, p. 282.

<sup>5</sup> *Cassin Young*, US destroyer (1943), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

<sup>6</sup> In *Death of a Navy*, pp. 211-12. D'Albas was a French naval officer who entered the Ecole Navale in 1914 and became captain in 1944. Before the war he served two terms attached to the French Embassy in Tokyo and married the daughter of Vice-Admiral Baron Yoshigoro Ito. He might therefore be expected to have an appreciation of both Western and Japanese reactions.

The suicide aircraft flew from Kyushu. The pilots, almost all young, if not adolescent, saluted their chiefs and the comrades they would never see again. They took their places alone in their crudely constructed aircraft and without hesitation set out to accomplish their pathetic mission. . . . It is difficult to describe the feelings of the Western sailors, people of so rational a turn of mind, when they saw in the skies above their ships these clouds of desperate assailants, often mounted in unbelievable concoctions of string and wood; attackers whom it was impossible to frighten or turn aside by a barrage of fire or by the attacks of fighters. It was essential to kill them in flight before they reached the targets toward which their mad course was directed. Before this terrible onslaught which was beyond the comprehension of the Western world, how could the Allies remain free from an amazed horror? It was as if they were watching the unleashing of some evil and mysterious force.

A British naval view of *Kikusui* was:

Logically, suicide attack in any of the forms, air or sea, practised by the Japanese, differed only in kind from the last ditch defence enjoined upon the British after Dunkirk, and only in degree from such missions as the air attack on the Mohne Dam. Probably, however, the Japanese committed a cardinal error when they made suicide operations compulsory. What in the Philippines had been a crusade was at Okinawa deprived of all humanity and the virtue went out of it. Long after *Kamikaze* was known to have failed, pilots, even those then under training, were herded to their death, knowing that the Emperor whom they had regarded as a Supreme Being and the country for which they were giving their lives in vain, had no longer any consideration for them as human beings.

Though the main Japanese air attacks at Okinawa were against the Americans, Task Force 57 came in for its share of suicide attacks during May. On the 1st of the month the force left Leyte after its few days of stand off, and returned to continue its neutralisation of the Sakishima group airfields, with the 4th Destroyer Flotilla, including H.M.A. Ships *Quickmatch* and *Quiberon*, screening the battleships. On the day TF.57 sailed from Leyte, the Allied assault on Borneo took place. The American Chiefs of Staff had desired to use the British Pacific Fleet in that operation, but Admiral Nimitz prevailed upon them to retain its services in the Okinawa campaign.

Of TF.57's four carriers, *Formidable* had replaced *Illustrious*, which had developed structural defects, a legacy from the underwater damage she had suffered in the Mediterranean.<sup>7</sup> Operations were planned with a cycle of two days of strikes followed by two for replenishment. At 6 a.m. on 3rd May the force rendezvoused with the fuelling force in a replenishment area 300 miles south of Miyako, and next day launched its first second-phase strikes against that island and Ishigaki. In addition to the aerial bombardment, Admiral Rawlings at noon opened a 45-minute bombardment of Miyako with gunfire from his battleships and cruisers. During their absence from the screen, the Japanese launched an air attack by some 16 to 20 aircraft on the carriers. At 11.31 a.m. *Formidable* was crashed by a *Kamikaze*, fires were started among parked aircraft, and a small hole was made in the flight deck. She suffered 8 killed and 47 wounded, with 11

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<sup>7</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, pp. 301-2.



aircraft destroyed—but her flight deck was patched so that she could recover aircraft at 5 p.m. Commenting on this, the American naval historian remarked:

The armoured flight decks of British aircraft carriers, which American ship planners disliked because the weight affected stability and reduced the number of planes that could be carried, proved their value in these actions. A *Kamikaze* hitting a steel flight deck crumpled up like a scrambled egg and did comparatively little damage, whilst one crashing the wood flight deck of an American carrier usually penetrated to the hangar deck and raised hell below.<sup>8</sup>

When, on 6th May, TF.57 rendezvoused with the Logistic Support Group in area “Cootie”, 300 miles south-east of Miyako, to refuel, *Napier*, *Norman* and *Nepal* were there. The four destroyers of the 7th Flotilla were to have sailed from Leyte on 3rd May escorting the carriers *Striker*<sup>9</sup> and *Ruler*, and oilers *Wave King* and *Wave Monarch*<sup>1</sup> to “Cootie”, but owing to the discovery of cases of poliomyelitis on board, *Nizam* was quarantined and did not join the Logistic Support Group until the middle of the month. On 7th May, when TF.57 returned to its flying-off position, *Napier* formed part of its screen. *Norman* escorted the two oilers back to Leyte, and *Nepal* remained with the Logistic Support Group. Weather prevented TF.57 carrying out air operations on the 8th, but on the 9th, *Napier* reported, “many strikes were carried out and runways were rendered unserviceable”. That afternoon the fleet was again attacked by *Kamikazes*:

At about 1645 hostile aircraft were detected approaching the fleet from N.N.W. and, although a section of our fighters intercepted them some 15 miles from the fleet, only one was disposed of. The remainder (about 5) attacked the fleet some minutes later. All attackers were *Kamikazes*, and hits were made on *Victorious* and *Formidable*. Another machine attempted to attack *Howe*, but it was set on fire by *Howe*’s gunfire and crashed into the sea after passing low over her quarterdeck.<sup>2</sup>

*Formidable*’s attacker dived into her after-deck park, and put 18 aircraft out of action but caused little damage to the ship, which was fit to land-on aircraft fifty minutes later. *Victorious* was hit on the flight deck forward, where a resulting fire was quickly quelled. The armoured flight decks again proved their worth.

At the next refuelling period *Nepal* also joined TF.57 and she and *Napier* were on the screen during the force’s air strikes on the 12th and 13th, during which airfields were made unserviceable, and camouflaged dumps were bombed and set on fire. There was no Japanese air activity in the area. This was also the case during the air strikes on 16th and 17th May, when *Nepal* again accompanied TF.57, but *Napier* was detached to the Logistic Support Group.

*Norman* had her turn with TF.57 when she joined that force in the refuelling area on 19th May. Previously she had been on the screen of

<sup>8</sup> Morison, Vol XIV, p. 265.

<sup>9</sup> HMS *Striker*, escort carrier (1942), 11,000 tons, two 5-in DP or three 4-in AA guns, 15-20 aircraft, 16 kts.

<sup>1</sup> HMS’s *Wave King* and *Wave Monarch*, oilers (1944), 8,159 tons.

<sup>2</sup> *Napier*, Report of Proceedings, May 1945.

the Logistic Support Group, and escorting ships of that group to and from Leyte. It was when she was escorting *Wave King* and *Wave Monarch* to Leyte that

news was heard of Germany's unconditional surrender to the Allies on 8th May, and on the next day the Admiralty's message timed 081500B May, ordering the Main Brace to be spliced, was received. The passage to Leyte was otherwise uneventful and at 0730I/10 May the ships entered San Pedro Bay.<sup>3</sup>

Back in area "Cootie" on 16th May—after having had two Bofors guns, ex H.M.S. *Victorious*, fitted, one on either side of the ship in a space made available by the removal of the after torpedo tubes—*Norman* sailed with TF.57 for the combat area on 19th May. She did not, however, participate in any attack on the Japanese since on the 20th, just as the force was making its preliminary dispositions for flying-off operations, it entered dense fog which prohibited these, but was the cause of a collision between *Indomitable* and *Quilliam*, in which the destroyer was immobilised.

*Norman* intercepted a report of the collision on T.B.S. and Plunkett-Cole, appreciating that he was in the best position to stand by *Quilliam*, anticipated an order to do so from CTF.57, and proceeded to the scene. He found *Quilliam* badly damaged, with her bow bent round so that the stem faced over the ship's starboard quarter. *Norman* relieved the damaged ship of her port bower anchor, which was in the water and could not be lifted by *Quilliam*, and then took that ship in tow, stern first. The twisted portion of *Quilliam*'s bows, however, acted as a rudder with the helm hard a'port, and *Norman* could only tow her in circles. H.M. Tug *Weazel*<sup>4</sup> then took a hand, and took over the tow from *Norman*, which proceeded to fuel from the Logistic Support Group, and closed *King George V* to report on *Quilliam*'s condition by loud hailer, after which she rejoined *Quilliam* and *Weazel*—now making about 4.5 knots—during 22nd May, and screened them on passage to Leyte. In the early afternoon of the 25th H.M.A.S. *Burnie* (Lieut-Commander Andrewartha) joined, and after an unsuccessful attempt to help the tow, augmented the screen. The next morning U.S.S. *Turkey* (861 tons), a minesweeper converted to a tug, joined company and passed a tow to *Quilliam*'s port bow. "*Weazel* and *Turkey*—an unlikely and surprisingly harmonious combination—increased the speed of advance to six knots between them," Plunkett-Cole remarked in his Report of Proceedings. The convoy reached Leyte without incident at 6 p.m. on 27th May. After two days there—during which she returned to *Quilliam* her bower anchor and towing wire—*Norman* sailed for Manus, where she arrived on 1st June.

By this time the British Pacific Fleet had completed its task of cooperating in the Okinawa operation and, after final strikes against the Sakishima group on 25th May, TF.57 withdrew to Manus and thence to Sydney, where it arrived on 5th June. The four ships of the 7th Destroyer Flotilla also reached there at intervals during the first week of the month.

<sup>3</sup> *Norman*, Report of Proceedings, May 1945.

<sup>4</sup> HMT *Weazel*, fleet and rescue tug (1944), 783 tons, one 3-in gun, 14 kts.

In its period of employment in operation ICEBERG the British Pacific Fleet was at sea for 62 days, broken by eight days re-storing at Leyte. On the 23 strike days the carriers flew a total of 5,335 sorties, of which 2,073 had offensive purposes. The carrier aircraft dropped 958 tons of bombs on enemy installations, and fired many hundreds of rocket projectiles; the guns of the battleships and cruisers fired 200 tons of shells in their bombardment of Miyako on 4th May. The British aircraft losses totalled 160, of which 26 were shot down in combat and 72 destroyed operationally. Thirty-two were destroyed on their carriers by *Kamikaze* attacks, and a hangar fire in *Formidable* accounted for 30. Flying casualties numbered 41 killed and missing, and non-flying casualties were 44 killed and 83 wounded. "Contemporary estimates of losses inflicted on the enemy, which cannot be verified with any degree of accuracy, claimed 96 aircraft destroyed and nearly 200 small vessels (mostly under 250 tons) sunk or damaged by Rawlings's ships."<sup>5</sup>

On 27th May the American Fifth Fleet again became the Third Fleet; TF.58 became TF.38; and the British TF.57 became TF.37. This change resulted from Admiral Spruance relinquishing command of Fifth Fleet to Admiral Halsey. When he did so, he signalled to Admiral Rawlings:

I wish to express to you and to the officers and men under your command my appreciation of the fine work you have done and the splendid spirit of co-operation in which you have done it. To the American portion of the Fifth Fleet, Task Force 57 has typified the great traditions of the Royal Navy.

Through its work with Task Force 57 the Royal Australian Navy shared in this eulogy, and not only through the destroyers of the 4th and 7th Flotillas, but also through the ships of the 21st and 22nd Minesweeping Flotillas and smaller craft. Much of their work was routine—patrolling, minesweeping, escorting, and doing handmaiden tasks for the ships of TF.57 and the Logistics Group. But occasionally some special duty came to them. Such a one was that of *Kalgoorlie* (Lieut-Commander McBryde) which was in Leyte when the destroyer H.M.S. *Ulster* arrived there after being damaged by a near miss in the Japanese air attack on TF.57 on 1st April. McBryde recorded in his Report of Proceedings:

At 1340 on 6th April *Kalgoorlie* weighed anchor, and at 1355 secured alongside the damaged destroyer *Ulster*, where the bodies of two stokers killed during the Okinawa action, and recently recovered from the boiler room were placed on board. A mourning party of approximately 80 officers and men from *Tyne*<sup>6</sup> and *Ulster*, together with a firing party and the Church of England and Roman Catholic Chaplains repaired on board. At 1535 Rear-Admiral Edelsten [Rear-Admiral Destroyers] was received on board and the ship cast off and proceeded to sea. Engines were stopped between 1615 and 1640, when the burial service was carried out, and on completion the ship returned to harbour.

Two major events occurred during the Okinawa campaign. One was the death of President Roosevelt, which occurred in the afternoon of 12th

<sup>5</sup> Roskill, *The War At Sea*, Vol III, Part II, p. 354.

<sup>6</sup> HMS *Tyne*, destroyer depot ship (1940), 11,000 tons, eight 4.5-in guns, 17 kts.

April (Atlantic Coast Time) and the news of which came over the ships' loud speakers just as first light dawned over Okinawa on 13th April: "Attention! Attention! All hands! President Roosevelt is dead. Repeat, our Supreme Commander, President Roosevelt, is dead." The American naval historian recorded that "many refused to believe it until confirmed by a signal from Admiral Turner"; and "one felt a little better toward the Japanese because Radio Tokyo reported the President's death simply and decently".

The other event was the unconditional surrender of Germany. Early in this history it was recorded:<sup>7</sup>

Following the German attack on Poland, a British ultimatum had been given to Germany at 9.30 p.m. on 1st September [1939] English time. This was followed by a second and final ultimatum at 9 a.m. British summer time on 3rd September. Two hours later Great Britain declared war on Germany, and at 9.50 p.m. the same day, Eastern Australian time, the Imperial War Telegram naming Germany only was received at Navy Office, Melbourne, the Australian War Telegram being dispatched immediately to the Commonwealth's Naval Forces. Shortly following the receipt of the Imperial War Telegram, a further Admiralty message was received at Navy Office. It was: "Commence hostilities at once with Germany."

Now, five years, eight months and five days later, at around 9 a.m. Eastern Australian time on 8th May 1945, Navy Office, Melbourne, received from the Admiralty the news of the imminent cessation of those hostilities. In a signal dispatched at twelve minutes after midnight on 7th May, British summer time, the Admiralty told British naval authorities and their ships throughout the world:

German High Command has surrendered unconditionally all German Land Sea and Air Forces in Europe. Effective from 0001B hours, 9th May, from which hour all offensive operations are to cease. Due to difficulties of communication there may be some delay in reaching enemy forces. Accordingly danger of attack from random enemy surface craft U-boats and aircraft may persist for some time to come. The Fleet in all waters is to remain on a war footing and in a state of constant vigilance for the moment. Surrender procedure for U-boats will be promulgated separately. T.O.O. 080012B May 45.

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<sup>7</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, p. 64.

## CHAPTER 23

### AUSTRALIANS AT TARAKAN

AS stated in the previous chapter, on the day TF.57 sailed from Leyte for its second assault on the islands of the Sakishima group, the Allied assault on Borneo was launched; and Admiral Nimitz had to counter a desire of the American Chiefs of Staff to use the British Pacific Fleet in that operation.

On its arrival in Australian waters, the fleet became a subject of disagreement between Nimitz and MacArthur. Nimitz proposed to use it as a task force in the covering operations for the landings in the Ryukyus, and ordered it to work up with that employment in view. But MacArthur was anxious to use the fleet in the South-West Pacific, and the competing claims were reflected in Washington early in the New Year. The immediate future was, however, not clear. Operations after Okinawa must be related to an invasion of Japan, and that invasion was dependent on the redeployment of forces from Europe after the surrender of Germany. Intermediate operations must contain the large Japanese forces outside Japan for a period of perhaps six to nine months.

At the ARGONAUT Conference at Yalta in February 1945 the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that a plan of campaign was being prepared "in the event that prolongation of the European war requires postponement of the invasion of Japan until well into 1946". It included three possibilities:

- (1) An attack on the island of Hainan, to assist in cutting the Japanese sea communications and to secure a new airway to China.
- (2) An attack on North Borneo, to secure the oil and rubber supplies, and to threaten Japanese communications with South-East Asia.
- (3) An operation against the area Chusan-Ningpo in China (south of Hangchow and the estuary of the Yangtse River), to threaten the main Japanese river communications in China and to provide another base for close air attack on the Home Islands.<sup>1</sup>

The final choice would affect the forces in both the Central and South-West Pacific, and in the circumstances the American Navy was reluctant to commit the British Pacific Fleet to operations against the Ryukyus, since it regarded it as the most flexible element in the theatre's naval command. But eventually, under pressure from the British and from Nimitz, the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to approve the use of the British Fleet at the Ryukyus, and on 14th March Admiral Fraser was directed to report to Nimitz. It was made clear, however, that the fleet's part in the operation would be such that it could be withdrawn at seven days' notice for other duties, since the American Navy still wished to retain its flexibility as a strategic reserve, and the plans for Borneo were taking shape.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, Vol VI (1956), pp. 223-4, in the Military series of the British official *History of the Second World War*.

Politically it was desirable that British and Dutch forces should play a major role in the reoccupation of their former territories. The Joint Chiefs of Staff therefore planned to use Australian troops in the attack on Borneo, together with the British Pacific Fleet which could be provided with an advanced base at Brunei Bay. It was the provision of the Brunei Bay base which was given as the main object of the Borneo operations by Field Marshal Wilson in Washington, in conveying the American plan to the British Chiefs of Staff. The British, however, were lukewarm to the proposal, and on 27th April told Washington that, since Brunei Bay was too far from the main base in Australia on the one hand and the main theatre of operations against Japan on the other and would take too long to develop as a base,

the main object of these operations . . . does not in their [the British Chiefs of Staff] view justify initial and continuing expenditure of effort. . . . We suggest that the U.S. Chiefs of Staff should consider whether the allocation of resources to this project at this time is justified.<sup>2</sup>

In the event the participation of the British Fleet in the Borneo operation was not practicable. At the time of these exchanges between London and Washington it was engaged in the first phase of the Okinawa campaign, the unexpected slowness of which, coupled with the activities of the *Kikusui*, sharpened Nimitz's concern to retain it in the Ryukyus. And as stated above, it returned there after its period of refreshment at Leyte at the end of April. Naval support in the Borneo operation was thus confined to the Americans and Australians in the Seventh Fleet.

As stated earlier, the first Japanese *Kikusui* attack at Okinawa was on 6th April; and on that date the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a directive which derived from the major future prospect of which Okinawa was the prelude, and from which Borneo was not an isolated operation—the invasion of Japan. By the middle of April the Allies were planning on the basis of an end of the European war by 31st May. That being so, the Japanese home islands could be assaulted at Kyushu some time between 1st October and 1st December 1945. This made desirable a change in the structure of command to prepare for the invasion of Japan, and the J.C.S. directive created a new structure of command by Service instead of by area. This would for the time being parallel, and later replace, the existing area commands. Under it, MacArthur, in addition to being Supreme Commander, S.W.P.A., was also designated Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Army Forces, Pacific (CINCAFPAC) and would be responsible for “the provision of army resources to meet the requirements for operations in the Pacific directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff”. Nimitz would be on the sea what MacArthur was on the land, “responsible for the provision of naval resources to meet the requirements for operations in the Pacific directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff”. Strategic jurisdiction over the Pacific Theatre would be exercised by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ehrman, Vol VI, p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> Ehrman, Vol VI, pp. 226-35.

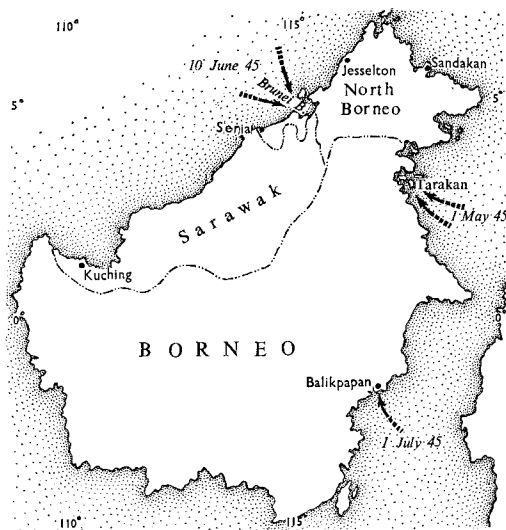
With this change in the structure of command came a proposal to create a British Command in the South-West Pacific. This proposal was still under discussion between the British and the American Chiefs of Staff when the Japanese surrendered in August.

## II

The Staff Study for OBOE ONE, the seizure of Tarakan, dated 18th March 1945, named P-day ("Peter-day") for Tarakan as 29th April 1945. The task assigned was to destroy the hostile garrison and seize Tarakan Island, establish air elements for support of subsequent operations, protect and conserve the oil wells and refineries, and assist in the re-establishment of constituted government in the area.

The third largest island in the world, extending some 700 miles from 7 degrees north to 4 degrees south of the Equator and approximately the same distance from east to west at its greatest width, Borneo occupies a commanding position in the centre of the land-surrounded sea bordered by Indo-China, Malaya, Sumatra, Java, Celebes and the Philippines. With mountainous terrain, it was largely undeveloped in 1945, with no more than 1,000 miles of metalled roads. Its value lay in its oil, and its strategic position. Under Japanese control it had become a major source of fuel oil for the Japanese Navy, particularly valuable in that some of its production—of the Seria field—was suitable for bunkers without distillation. The oil was in three main regions: on Tarakan Island off the north-east coast, at Balikpapan in the south-east, and at Seria in the British state of Brunei in the north-west. In addition, Brunei Bay afforded a deep-water anchorage of some 225 square miles.

Tarakan Island, about one-third of the distance down Borneo's east coast, lies close off shore, only two or three miles from the swampy delta area at the mouth of the Sesajap River. Pear-shaped, with the stalk end to the south, the island is some 15 miles long by 11 in greatest width. Its hilly centre of rain forest jungle descends to a mangrove-swamp



Borneo assaults, May-July 1945

bordered coastline, with shallow beaches of sand or mud. It is approachable only by sea, and is approximately 716 nautical miles from Manila and 912 from Singapore. The island's port is Lingkas, on the south-west coast about two miles from the town of Tarakan. Primarily an oil exporting port, it had docking facilities and secure harbourage in all weathers. The vicinity of Lingkas harbour is one of only three coastal areas on the island where hills or negotiable terrain exist—the others are on Tarakan's southern extremity and north-western tip. Lingkas was the natural selection for the landing as having the island's best—though by no means ideal—beach, some 6,500 feet long and 300 feet wide and composed mostly of soft mud, and being conveniently located with reference to the two major objectives, the Tarakan oilfield, two and a half miles to the north-east, and the aerodrome, three and a half miles to the north-west. Both of these were connected to Lingkas by a good two-lane road running parallel to the beach.

To the natural hazards of the beach were added the complication of off-shore mines and beach obstacles. The mines were Dutch, Japanese and "influence" mines which had been laid by Allied Air Forces with the aim of denying the port to Japanese tankers. There were four rows of obstacles: from shore to seaward, a Dutch double-apron fence; a double row of posts, each post mined; an intermittent double-apron fence; and a double row of steel rails and iron tubes. The Japanese garrison, of about 2,200, comprised 800 in a naval guard force, 200 air service troops and 1,200 base and service personnel. There were six coast defence guns.

The deteriorated Japanese air power in the Netherlands East Indies and South-East Asia was expected to offer little obstruction. Good radar coverage of all approaches to Borneo precluded surprise, and little or no enemy intervention on the sea passage to Tarakan was contemplated. Such attacks as might be made during the landings and later were seen as sporadic efforts at dawn or dusk by small formations. No naval intervention was considered likely, since analysis of Japanese naval strength indicated that no surface warships or submarines were farther west and south than Singapore-Camranh Bay. There was a possibility of efforts by small suicide boats.

G.H.Q. Operations Instruction No. 99 of 21st March 1945 nominated 29th April as P-day for the assault on Tarakan. In commands, it set out the pattern for most of the Borneo operations. Lieut-General Morshead<sup>4</sup>—as General Officer Commanding I Australian Corps under General Blamey, Commanding Allied Land Forces—was instructed to take Tarakan, using the 26th Brigade Group (Brigadier Whitehead<sup>5</sup>) of the 9th Australian Division, commanded by General Wootten. Under General

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Gen Sir Leslie Morshead, KCB, KBE, CMG, DSO, ED. Comd 18 Bde 1939-41; GOC 9 Div 1941-43, II Corps and NGF during 1943-44, I Corps 1944-45. Branch manager, shipping line; of Sydney; b. Ballarat, Vic, 18 Sep 1889. Died 26 Sep 1959.

<sup>5</sup> Brig D. A. Whitehead, CBE, DSO, MC, ED. CO 2/2 MG Bn 1940-42, 2/32 Bn 1942; Comd 26 Bde 1942-45. Engineer; of Sydney; b. Leith, Scotland, 30 Sep 1896.



Kenney, Commanding Allied Air Forces, Air Vice-Marshal Bostock,<sup>6</sup> R.A.A.F., had operational command of the Allied Air Forces taking part. Operating from Tawitawi, Zamboanga, Palawan, Morotai and Leyte, they began their strikes 18 days before the landing. Vice-Admiral Kinkaid, Commanding Allied Naval Forces, was responsible for the transportation and landing of the assault forces, reinforcement and re-supply, until this was taken over by U.S.A.S.O.S., and to provide fire support for the landing. Vice-Admiral Barbey, Commander VII Amphibious Force, was the Task Force Commander for all the Borneo operations, and Rear-Admiral Royal, Commander Amphibious Group Six, was the Attack Group Commander in the Tarakan and Brunei operations—Rear-Admiral Noble succeeded him in command of Amphibious Group Six at Balikpapan. The Attack Group at Tarakan comprised the Flagship *Rocky Mount*<sup>7</sup> with two L.S.I's, H.M.A. Ships *Manoora* (Captain Cousin) and *Westralia* (Commander Livingston), and some 120 other ships and landing craft, with a screen of seven destroyers, two destroyer-escorts, three frigates—H.M.A. Ships *Burdekin* (Lieut-Commander Marchington), *Barcoo* (Lieut-Commander Hill) and *Hawkesbury* (Lieut-Commander Purvis<sup>8</sup>)—and 21 motor torpedo boats, a Minesweeping and Hydrographic Unit and a Beach Unit. Rear-Admiral Berkey commanded the cruiser covering group, TG.74.3, comprising *Phoenix* (Flag) and *Boise*, and H.M.A.S. *Hobart*, and five American destroyers and H.M.A.S. *Warramunga*. Commander Oom commanded the Hydrographic Unit in H.M.A.S. *Lachlan*,<sup>9</sup> and Lieut-Commander Morris<sup>1</sup> commanded the Beach Unit.

Planning for the operation began on 26th March and continued throughout April. After studies of beach profiles and conditions, and times of sunrise and high tides, it was decided to postpone P-day from 29th April to 1st May; to make a landing on Sadau Island, five miles north-west of Lingkas, with one company of infantry and to emplace an artillery battery there on P—1-day; and also on that day to send Royal Australian Engineers into Lingkas harbour to breach the beach defences.

On 22nd April the Minesweeping and Hydrographic Group left Leyte for Tarakan via Zamboanga, where other units were to join up with it. On 24th April a rehearsal of the actual assault was carried out by the Attack Group, TG.78.1, in Morotai Strait, and an area was chosen which simulated as near as possible the conditions expected at Tarakan. Admiral Royal, in his report of the operation, remarked that "many defects were disclosed in this exercise". An example of such defects was that resulting in the drowning of four soldiers from *Manoora*. Because of the known

<sup>6</sup>AVM W. D. Bostock, CB, DSO, OBE. Deputy Chief of Air Staff 1939-41; Chief of Staff AAF SWPA 1942; AOC RAAF Cd 1942-46. MHR 1949-58. Regular air force officer; b. Sydney, 5 Feb 1892. Died 28 Apr 1968.

<sup>7</sup>*Rocky Mount*, US amphibious force command ship (1943), 7,431 tons.

<sup>8</sup>Capt I. K. Purvis, RAN. HMAS *Sydney* 1938-40; served RN 1941-43; comd HMAS's *Wagga* 1943, *Hawkesbury* 1945-46. Of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Melbourne, 31 May 1916.

<sup>9</sup>HMAS's *Burdekin*, *Hawkesbury*, *Lachlan*, frigates (1944-45), 1,420 tons, two 4-in AA guns, 20 kts.

<sup>1</sup>Lt-Cdr B. J. B. Morris, RANR. Served RN 1941-44; comd Beach Unit 1944-45. Of Hobart; b. Dover, Tas, 21 Oct 1905.

muddy nature of the beach at Lingkas it was believed that the successful beaching of L.C.V.P's was problematical. Accordingly it was decided to experiment with a type of collapsible wood and canvas boat, and land initial waves of troops from L.C.V.P's in these craft. The intention was to embark seventeen fully equipped troops in each of these boats which would then be towed in pairs—one boat in each pair was equipped with an outboard motor—as close inshore as possible by L.C.V.P's. When slipped, the powered boat would take the other in tow, and they would proceed to the beach together. It was the capsizing of one of these collapsible boats which led to the loss of the four soldiers. More could have been lost had not three of the *Manoora's* L.C.V.P. crew dived in and helped the soldiers to the life-lines.

As a result of experiments carried out by *Manoora*, it was found that the Australian life-saving jacket was not buoyant enough to support a fully equipped soldier.

An expert swimmer was selected and fully equipped with A.I.F. accoutrements. It was observed that despite movements of his limbs in the water, a fully inflated Australian "Mae West" was insufficiently buoyant to support a man in the water, with all his gear attached. Whereas similar movements of the limbs when an American inflatable life-belt was worn would keep the man afloat.<sup>2</sup>

On 24th April, while the Attack Group was exercising, Berkey's cruiser covering group—TG.74.3—left Subic Bay and made an uneventful passage to Tarakan via Mindoro Strait, the Sulu Sea and the Sibutu Passage between Tawitawi Island and Borneo's north-easternmost promontory of Hog Point. The passage was made in perfect weather.

We travelled over a glassy sea usually to be found only in romantic novels of the South Seas. Now and then the smooth surface was broken by the gambolling of shoals of porpoises. No doubt there were several cases of near heart failure among the lookouts, but that was the only danger that seemed to threaten.<sup>3</sup>

TG.74.3 entered Sibutu Passage about 4 p.m. on 26th April, and encountered a number of rafts with Japanese on board who were trying to reach Borneo from one of the islands. Five occupants from one raft surrendered. Those on the other rafts committed suicide or were destroyed.

That day the Sadau Island Attack Unit sailed from Morotai Strait, and next day the main assault force—Royal's TG.78.1—sailed from Morotai. H.M.A. Ships *Manoora* and *Westralia* had embarked respectively 1,180 officers and men, including the 2/48th Battalion, A.I.F., and 1,047 officers and men, including the 2/24th Battalion, A.I.F. Each ship had an L.C.T. in tow. *Barcoo*, *Burdekin* and *Hawkesbury* formed part of the screen. In all, the convoy of some 150 ships and landing craft carried nearly 13,000 troops on an uneventful voyage to their destination.

On the 27th, the day the main assault force left Morotai, Berkey's TG.74.3 arrived at Tarakan, and at daylight rendezvoused with the Mine-sweeping and Hydrographic Group, and *Hobart* "identified H.M.A.S.

<sup>2</sup> Report, Australian L.S.I. in Operation Oboe 1, by Commander A. H. Green, RAN.

<sup>3</sup> Personal Narrative of Part Played by *Hobart* at Tarakan, by Supply Petty-Officer C. Phillips.

*Lachlan* working with this group". Minesweeping and channel marking proceeded, while TF.74.3 steamed on a north-south line outside the 100 fathom line until the first approach channel was clear. "During the day," reported *Hobart*, "columns of smoke were noted rising from Tarakan, and by noon heavy black smoke was rising to great heights." TG.74.3 stood by in support of the minesweepers all day—during which four Allied magnetic mines and two Japanese horned mines were swept<sup>4</sup>—and next day carried out the first bombardments of enemy shore positions. *Phoenix* and *Hobart* took part, and repeated their bombardments on the 29th—P—2-day. That evening the Sadau Island Attack Force arrived, with the Australian engineers who were to land on Tarakan to destroy the beach obstacles, and it was arranged for destroyers to take over bombardment duties in support of this landing next day.

The Sadau landing was made without opposition at 8 a.m. on the 30th, and a battery of 25-pounder guns was emplaced to cover the landing beaches; at 9.30 a.m. destroyers of TG.74.3—including *Warramunga*—covered the operations of the engineers breaching the obstructions. *Warramunga* bombarded in direct support and no enemy interference was encountered. At 1.45 p.m. the operation was completed, and *Warramunga* and U.S.S. *Jenkins* were retiring, when the American ship was mined and stopped dead. Attempts by *Warramunga* to take her in tow were unsuccessful but eventually, in the early evening, *Jenkins* was able to proceed under her own power and both ships rejoined TG.74.3 in the retirement area.

At this time Admiral Royal's main assault force was approaching Tarakan, and was deploying into its approach formation. The two Australian landing ships slipped their L.C.T's, which joined the others of their class in a group with H.M.A.S. *Barcoo* as senior officer and took station six miles astern of the main convoy. The final approach of the assault force to its objective was made through intermittent heavy rain squalls. Cousin in *Manoora* recorded that

had it not been moonlight there would have been serious danger of collision or grounding, especially when negotiating the very narrow and tidal entrance close south of Tarakan Island, with three ships in line abreast.

However the approach was made without mishap. As stated above, air strikes—against north-west and south Borneo—began on P—18, by the Thirteenth Air Force and the First Tactical Air Force, R.A.A.F. From P—5 to P—2-day these air forces attacked targets in and around Tarakan and the landing beaches. In direct support of the assault a group of B-24's bombed the landing beach area, and another group struck enemy installations and positions in the primary and secondary target areas. Berkey's TG.74.3 followed the assault force to the fire support sectors and the pre-landing bombardment was carried out, both *Hobart* and *Warramunga* taking part. Fire ceased at 8.30 as the assault waves went in on schedule,

<sup>4</sup> In the six days from P—4-day to P+1-day (27th April to 2nd May inclusive) 12 Allied magnetic, 25 Japanese, 2 unidentified and 5 "influence" mines were swept.

to land without opposition and with no trouble from the landing obstacles, which had been successfully breached.

Despite the numerous beach obstacles (reported Commander Green) the landing was accomplished with marked success, and the troops were put ashore with speed and precision. The whole foreshore was strongly fortified with concrete pillboxes and gun emplacements, and had the Japanese elected to remain in these positions and fight, our casualties would have been extremely heavy. . . . As the tide began to fall the difficulty of landing stores became marked. The foreshore consisted of long stretches of deep mud into which large stakes and sharp spikes had been embedded. Vehicles attempting to land through this mud became hopelessly bogged, and such was the rapidity of the fall of the tide that were any delay experienced in unloading a boat, it meant that boat was stranded beyond hope of refloating until the next high tide.

At the Tarakan landing excellent and valuable work was done by the R.A.N. Commando "B" beach parties under the command of Lieut-Commander Morris and comprising 18 officers and 113 ratings, divided into four beach parties—Red, Green and Yellow Beaches at Tarakan and Blue Beach at Sadau Island—a Signal Section and a Boat Repair and Recovery Section. It was the first operation undertaken by an R.A.N. Beach Commando and was carried out under difficult conditions in a most successful manner. The beach parties, which landed with the first wave of each forward battalion, carried out reconnaissance, marked beaches, established and maintained signal communications, organised and furthered unloading of craft, salvaged craft which became stranded, and generally organised and conducted the work on the beaches.

The beach conditions delayed the unloading and departure of the L.S.I's and Admiral Royal directed that there should be no night retirement from the area but that unloading should proceed all night to take advantage of high tide. *Manoora* completed unloading at 1.55 a.m. on 2nd May, but *Westralia* did not complete until the forenoon of that day; at noon the two Australian ships, with the American L.S.D. *Rushmore* (4,490 tons), sailed for Morotai under destroyer escort to load and return. Meanwhile, at 4 p.m. on 1st May, *Hobart* and *Warramunga*, released by Royal, sailed for Hollandia on another mission. Of the other Australian ships, *Lachlan* remained at Tarakan until 8th May, carrying out a detailed survey of Tarakan road; and the other three frigates were there for varying periods throughout the month on patrol, radar screen, escorting and other duties. *Burdekin* was the first to leave and sailed on the 5th, escorting a convoy to Morotai, and proceeded thence to Sydney for refit. *Hawkesbury*—which on the 5th, while detailed as fire support ship to clear the southern tip of the island, bombarded targets with direct hits and blew up a petrol dump—finally sailed from Tarakan on the 17th. *Barcoo*—apart from one or two absences as convoy escort—was there until the end of the month.

On shore, sniping at the beaches by Japanese mortars on the reverse slopes of the hills began with darkness and the troops advancing inland met growing opposition, with the Japanese almost all fighting to the death. For some days after the assault phase Lieut-Commander Morris acted

as Port Director until relieved on 17th May. Three casualties, two of them fatal, were suffered by the R.A.N. Commando Beach Unit when Red Beach came under enemy fire in the early morning of 2nd May.<sup>5</sup> Many shells, believed to be from a 75-mm gun, landed in the Beach Control Point area, and *LST585* was straddled.

Tarakan airfield was captured on 5th May but was not operational until 20th June. Meantime the R.A.A.F. assumed responsibility for aerial defence on 16th May, working from Tawitawi. The oilfields, badly damaged, were secured by the end of May, and the Dutch Rehabilitation Service had them in production by the beginning of July. Before then, on 23rd June, it was announced that organised enemy resistance on the island had ceased.

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<sup>5</sup> Telegraphists J. R. Brady and W. F. Ryan were killed and Signalman C. Ikin was wounded.

## CHAPTER 24

### “MOPPING-UP” NEW GUINEA AND THE SOLOMONS

WHILE the ships and men of the R.A.N. Squadron were thus cooperating with the troops of the 9th Australian Division in the fighting in Borneo, other units of the Australian Navy were giving support to the men of the 5th and 6th Divisions engaged in operations against the Japanese in New Britain and New Guinea respectively. It will be recalled that in November H.M.A.S. *Swan*, in company with *Barcoo* and *Vendetta*, carried out operation BATTLEAXE in New Britain under the operational command of Commander Morrow (Commander (D)) in *Vendetta*, when they bombarded targets in Wide Bay. Later *Swan* was briefly commanded by Morrow during his period at Mios Wundi as Commander (D). On 9th and 10th January, in company with H.M.A. Ships *Cowra*<sup>1</sup> (Lieutenant Gillies<sup>2</sup>) and *Kapunda* (Lieutenant Callow) she carried out bombardments of the coast of Galela Bay, Halmahera. On 10th February Lieutenant Dovers<sup>3</sup> assumed command of *Swan* vice Morrow, and she reverted to a private ship. As such, her first mission was to carry N.O.I.C. Torokina (Commander Feldt) and staff from Madang to the Bougainville port, there to establish a Port Directorate. Back in Madang on 22nd February, under instructions from N.O.I.C. New Guinea, Captain Esdaile, *Swan* sailed next day for Aitape to carry out bombardments on targets selected by the G.O.C. 6th Division, Major-General Stevens.<sup>4</sup>

On 10th February General Stevens received a decision by Lieut-General V. A. H. Sturdee, G.O.C. First Army, commanding all Australian forces in Australian New Guinea, that the 6th Division might press on to Wewak, although it would be given no additional resources. Stevens promptly informed his subordinates that he intended to take, in succession, But, Dagua and Wewak and, in the mountains, to capture Maprik and advance eastward. Having issued the orders necessary to set his plans in motion, Stevens told Sturdee that the advance eastward had begun but that “administratively the operation was a complete gamble”, because he had no guarantee that five L.C.T.’s then at Aitape would remain in his area, and weather might dislocate the road, sea and air routes for days on end. By 23rd February Stevens was well on his way to his first objective, with his advanced forces within about ten miles of But. It was at this stage that *Swan* arrived to support with bombardments.

<sup>1</sup> HMAS *Cowra*, corvette (1943), 650 tons, one 4-in gun, 15½ kts.

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Cdr W. J. Gillies, RANR. Comd HMAS’s *Wongala* 1940-41, *Coombar* 1941-43, *Goonambee* 1943, *Cowra* 1943-45. Merchant seaman; of Adelaide; b. Scotland, 9 Dec 1904.

<sup>3</sup> Capt W. J. Dovers, DSC; RAN. HMAS’s *Canberra*, *Nestor* and *Quickmatch*; comd HMAS *Swan* and SO Wewak Force 1945. Of Wollongong, NSW; b. Eastwood, NSW, 12 Feb 1918.

<sup>4</sup> Maj-Gen Sir Jack Stevens, KBE, CB, DSO, ED. Comd 6 Div Sigs 1939-40, 21 Bde 1940-42; GOC 4 Div 1942, NT Force and 12 Div 1942-43, 6 Div 1943-45. Public Servant; of Melbourne; b. Daylesford, Vic, 7 Sep 1896.

The situation when *Swan* arrived at Aitape on 24th February was that the Australians had reached the Anumb River, about 54 miles east of Aitape. The Japanese held Sowom village, some 2,000 yards east of the river, and it was appreciated that this was a probable reserve area for the defence of the Anumb River, where enemy opposition appeared to be stiffening. Kauk village, three miles east of Sowom, and the But River, six miles farther east, were apparently a reserve and store depot and a large forward store area, respectively. It was known that the Japanese had several 75-mm field guns on the coast, some of which had not been located. It was decided, after a conference between Dovers and Stevens, that *Swan* should carry out bombardments of Sowom, Kauk and But.

Targets in two areas at Sowom were bombarded on the 25th. Just after midnight on the 26th *Swan* bombarded a target area at the But River, and on completion carried out an anti-barge patrol in the vicinity of the enemy-occupied Walis and Kairiru Islands, to the north-east of But, and along the adjacent New Guinea coast. In the vicinity of the But River Dovers decided to spray the shoreline and valley with oerlikon fire, and this produced retaliation in the form of two rounds of estimated 75-mm fire from the shore—one 400 yards short and the other 500 yards over. *Swan* withdrew to seaward, and reply to the gunfire was not undertaken since the position of the gun was uncertain. Just after dawn on the 27th *Swan* arrived off Kauk and bombarded an area there. Dovers recorded in his report that "smoke was observed to be persistent over the area for some time after cease fire".

It had been intended that before returning to Madang *Swan* should carry out a night bombardment of But on 28th February; but in the meantime an enemy wireless station had been located on high ground above Onamu Point, on the western side of Kairiru Island, and this target was substituted. Allied Intelligence had reported the presence of guns up to 75-mm along Kairiru's north coast, and the shoot—at 13 minutes past midnight on 1st March—was carried out at a range of between 9,000 and 10,000 yards, with the ship steaming at 12 knots parallel to the coast. Subsequent reconnaissance photographs showed several rounds—100 were fired—within 100 yards of the target. The 6th Division supplied a bombardment liaison officer and staff, and aircraft spotting was made available by 71 Wing, R.A.A.F., for the day bombardment. Dovers reported that the cooperation "was an important factor in the success of the operation", while "the value of having a Naval Liaison Officer who has local knowledge and contacts was also very apparent".

*Swan* arrived at Madang in the late afternoon of 1st March, and on the 5th sailed for Jacquinot Bay, New Britain—where she arrived on the 7th—for bombardments in support of the 5th Australian Division. In the afternoon of 6th March she exchanged identities with H.M.S. *King George V*, leading major units of the British Pacific Fleet on their way to Manus on their first arrival in the area. On the 8th Dovers carried

out a preliminary reconnaissance of the Wide Bay area in *ML804* (Lieutenant Brooker<sup>5</sup>). While there, in conference with Brigadier Sandover,<sup>6</sup> commanding the 6th Brigade, it was decided that *Swan* should carry out harassing fire on targets in Jacquinot Bay, just west of Cape Archway, the north-eastern extremity of Wide Bay and in Adler Bay, just north of that cape. These bombardments were carried out on 9th and 10th March. Between them, *Swan* anchored for the night in Henry Reid Bay and Dovers reported that "an enemy aircraft, out on a search apparently, failed to observe this and on its search bombed and strafed *ML825*", which shot it down. *ML825* (Lieutenant Venables<sup>7</sup>) was attacked about ten miles south-west of Cape Orford by a Japanese fighter aircraft. On its second strafing run Signalman Crowe,<sup>8</sup> at the bridge oerlikon gun, though wounded by shrapnel, carried on firing until the aircraft passed over the ship. As it did so, the aircraft burst into flames and crashed close inshore about one mile from *ML825* and sank before she could reach it. Though she searched the area she found no sign of the pilot. He, however, had reached the shore and was captured by natives on 13th March and taken to 5th Division headquarters.

Between her Wide Bay and Open Bay firings, *Swan* returned to Madang. On arrival at Open Bay at 8.40 a.m. on 17th March she embarked Lieut-Colonel Isaachsen,<sup>9</sup> commanding the 36th Battalion, and an A.I.B. representative for the firings. Five targets were selected but only the first, at the mouth of the Matalaili River, was engaged. The weather deteriorated, with visibility reduced to 1,000 yards; and since local opinion was that it had set in "for at least 48 hours", the army visitors were disembarked and *Swan* returned to Madang.

## II

After this interlude *Swan* returned to her support of the 6th Division in the Aitape-Wewak area, where she arrived on 7th April. Meanwhile, on 19th March, Stevens advanced two plans for the capture of Wewak to General Blamey, who was then on a visit to the 6th Division. The first plan provided for an overland advance along the coastal plain, and the second for a major amphibious attack at Dove Bay, east of Wewak. At the time, General Blamey visualised little likelihood of obtaining the necessary requirements for the amphibious operation, and decided that the land assault on Wewak should be undertaken. To facilitate this, he successfully moved to have G.H.Q. allot an additional ten L.C.T's to the 6th Division, and Stevens was advised of this on 24th March. Later, since he would soon be within range of guns of up to 105-mm around Wewak

<sup>5</sup> Lt N. F. Brooker, RANVR. Comd HMAS's *Marlean* 1942-43, *ML804* 1943-45. Wool buyer's clerk; of Willoughby, NSW; b. Artarmon, NSW, 22 Apr 1909.

<sup>6</sup> Brig R. L. Sandover, DSO, ED. CO 2/11 Bn 1941-43; comds 6 Bde 1943-45. Accountant and company director; of London and Perth, WA; b. Richmond, Surrey, England, 28 Mar 1910.

<sup>7</sup> Lt H. Venables, RANVR. HMAS *Heros*; comd HMAS's *Faye C.* 1942-43, *ML824* 1943-44, *ML825* 1944-45; SRD. Deep sea fisherman; of Brisbane; b. Jersey, Channel Is, 31 Dec 1912.

<sup>8</sup> Sig W. L. Crowe, B4997; HMAS *ML825*. Of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 4 Aug 1925.

<sup>9</sup> Lt-Col O. C. Isaachsen, DSO, ED. 2/27 Bn; CO 36 Bn 1942-45. Barrister and solicitor; of Malvern, SA; b. Mannum, SA, 5 Jun 1911.



and on the near-by islands, Stevens asked for additional naval vessels, and these were soon forthcoming.<sup>1</sup>

When *Swan* arrived at Aitape on 7th April Dovers found that General Stevens had selected bombardment targets in the Cape Karawop and Cape Boiken areas, 14 miles east of But. The first attempt to engage these, on 8th April, was unsuccessful, due to heavy rain reducing visibility to half a mile. The next day, however, successful shoots were carried out on enemy store and ammunition dumps in the vicinity of Boiken Plantation and on Cape Karawop. After this bombardment *Swan* proceeded to Milne Bay to embark ammunition. She was back at Aitape on 19th April and next day, as ordered by N.O.I.C. New Guinea, Dovers assumed command of Wewak Force, comprising H.M.A. Ships *Swan*, *Colac*, Group 2 (Lieutenant Hopper,<sup>2</sup> S.O.) with *Dubbo* (Lieutenant Roberts) and *Deloraine* (Lieutenant Gourlay); and Group 3, of ships of the 1st New Guinea M.L. Flotilla, *ML804* (Lieutenant Brooker, S.O.) with *ML808* (Lieutenant Smith<sup>3</sup>), *ML816* (Lieutenant McLaren<sup>4</sup>), *ML820* (Lieutenant Milne,<sup>5</sup> R.N.V.R.) and *ML427* (Lieutenant Howitt). Initially, three M.L.'s of the flotilla were not available. *ML808* and *ML820* had not then arrived, and *ML811* (Lieutenant Holohan<sup>6</sup>) had been detached for duties with A.I.B. parties.

The situation at this stage was that the Japanese in the Wewak area, estimated to be 1,000 effective troops, were concentrated between the Hawain River, twelve miles to the west, and Cape Moem, five miles to the east, of Wewak. An additional 700 effective troops were estimated to be on Kairiru and Muschu Islands. There were numerous artillery and machine-gun positions along the coast and in the foothills. There was barge traffic between Wewak and the islands, and it was known that submarines had been supplying the Wewak area, though there had been few authenticated reports of sightings in recent months.

The 16th Brigade, supported by field artillery, was concentrated in the Karawop area, four miles west of the Hawain River, across which it was to establish a bridgehead. This would pave the way for the attack on Wewak proper, which would be carried out from the west by the 19th Brigade, which would relieve the 16th after the Hawain River bridgehead was established. The final clearing of the Wewak area would be combined with an amphibious landing in Dove Bay, in the shelter of Cape Moem. The object of this landing would be to establish a beach-head on Dove Bay, with a view to cutting the Wewak-Forok road and preventing a

<sup>1</sup> For the foregoing general remarks about the 6th Division, Long, *The Final Campaigns*, pp. 300-329, has been drawn upon.

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Cdr K. J. Hopper, RANR. HMAS's *Manoora*, *Marawah*, *Adelaide*, *Sprightly*; comd HMAS *Colac* 1944-45. Merchant seaman; of Sydney; b. Taree, NSW, 26 Nov 1919.

<sup>3</sup> Lt D. A. P. Smith, RANVR. Comd HMAS's *ML299* 1941-43, *ML427* 1944, *ML808* 1944-45. Public servant; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 1 Oct 1918.

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Cdr K. J. McLaren, RANR. HMAS *Westralia*; comd HMAS's *Miramar* 1943, *ML816* 1943-44 and 1945-46. Bank officer; of Adelaide; b. Sydney, 2 May 1916.

<sup>5</sup> Lt J. Milne, RANVR. HMAS *ML813*; comd HMAS *ML820* 1943-46. B. Scotland, 27 Dec 1913.

<sup>6</sup> Lt T. J. Holohan, RANVR. HMAS *Stella*; comd HMAS's *ML425* 1944, *ML811* 1945-46. Accountant; of Brisbane; b. Barcaldine, Qld, 2 March 1903.

Japanese retreat to the east. The mission of Wewak Force was to support the Australian advance with bombardments by *Swan* and the corvettes, while the M.L.'s carried out night patrols and observation, offensive strafing and anti-barge patrols, and probed enemy defences under cover of bombardments by the bigger ships. Wewak Force would also provide the naval force for the Dove Bay amphibious operation.

In the initial stages Wewak Force was based on Aitape. Its first operation, on 21st April, was a searching sweep of a minefield west of Kairiru Island, laid by H.M.S. *Ariadne*, and set to sink in November 1944. This sweep, with negative results, was carried out by *Deloraine* and *Colac*, with *ML816*; while *ML804* and *ML427* patrolled, searching fruitlessly for A.I.B. personnel reported to have escaped from Muschu Island.<sup>7</sup> *Swan* and *Dubbo* covered the minesweeping operation from seaward. There was no enemy activity, although at times the sweeping ships were less than one mile off shore.

The first offensive patrol by M.L.'s, covering the area from Cape Boiken on the mainland to the entrance to Muschu Strait and the west coast of Muschu Island was carried out on the 23rd, and evoked only one short burst of machine-gun fire from the mainland near Cape Boiken. Next day the first major bombardment—by *Deloraine* and *Colac*—was carried out, with the main enemy defensive position on Muschu Island as target. On the 25th *Swan* bombarded Cape Wom—at the western end of Wewak west harbour. The ship was in close proximity to enemy territory and *Colac* and *Dubbo* guarded the mainland and Muschu Island in case of small arms fire during the bombardment. Subsequently the two corvettes fired a concentration shoot on Cape Wom. The force spent 26th April searching for a submarine reported 90 miles north-west of Kairiru Island, steering south, and presumably running supplies to the Wewak garrison. But no contact was made. *Swan* and the corvettes carried out bombardments on the 27th, with success against naval defence guns on Kairiru Island, and that night the search for the reported submarine was resumed, though fruitlessly. M.L.'s again carried out offensive patrols. Next day, *Deloraine* left the force on passage south to dock and refit.

### III

On the day *Deloraine* left Wewak Force, N.O.I.C. New Guinea signalled *Swan* and the 6th Division: "Information received that H.M.A.S. *Hobart* and two destroyers will be made available for Wewak operations." The information came from Vice-Admiral Kinkaid who, on the 27th, advised Captain Esdaile that the intention was to use *Hobart* and one American

<sup>7</sup> It had been contemplated in the early planning stages of the Wewak operation that a landing on Muschu Island would be made. With this in view, an effort to reconnoitre the island was made by an A.I.B. party of eight, landed on Muschu from a motor launch on 11th April. The attempt was dogged by misfortune. Seven members of the party were killed in action with Japanese patrols, or were "missing believed killed". Only one, Sapper E. T. Dennis, escaped from the island to the mainland, where he was recovered by a patrol on the Hawait River on 20th April.

and one Australian destroyer at Wewak, and asked Commodore Farncomb's views as to flying his broad pendant in *Hobart* during the operation. Farncomb was then in *Shropshire* in Australia and on the 25th had told Kinkaid of his intention not to remain in *Shropshire* while she worked up after refit, but to leave Sydney about mid-May and wear his broad pendant in *Hobart* until *Shropshire* was fully operational. He welcomed Kinkaid's suggestion and arranged to join *Hobart* at Hollandia about 7th May. Later Kinkaid's earlier intention to use one Australian and one American destroyer at Wewak was amended and the two Australian ships, *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, were used.

Meanwhile, Admiral Fraser wanted British representation at Wewak, and on 1st May informed Admiral Nimitz that the cruiser H.M.S. *Newfoundland*,<sup>8</sup> then in Sydney, was not required immediately with TF.57 and could leave Sydney on 4th May. "If you approve and Commander 7th Fleet concurs I would like her to join in the operation serving under Commodore Farncomb and subsequently as required. Commodore Farncomb agrees." Thus *Newfoundland* (Captain R. W. Ravenhill, R.N.) joined TG.74.1 temporarily.

Throughout the remainder of April and the early days of May Wewak Force continued its support of the 6th Division with planned bombardments and strafings, both of the mainland and the islands. On 30th April the force left Aitape and based at But, where the divisional headquarters were now established. *ML808* joined during the 30th and McLaren of *ML816*, having been promoted to lieutenant-commander, assumed the title of Senior Officer Motor Launches, vice Brooker in *ML804*.

Naval orders for operation DELUGE—landing the Australian assault force, designated Farida Force, in Dove Bay and covering the landing with bombardments—were prepared and issued by Dovers as S.O. Wewak Force.<sup>9</sup> The force comprised H.M.A. Ships *Swan*, *Colac*, *Dubbo*; M.L's *816*, *804*, *808*, *820* and *427*; and 12 landing craft. TG.74.1, in the role of Wewak Support Force, was assigned the task of carrying out preliminary bombardment and fire support duties during the landing period. D-day was set for 11th May. The first preliminary rehearsal of the landing was carried out by Wewak Force on 6th May, and on the 8th troops were embarked and a full dress rehearsal of the operation was staged successfully. Reconnaissance of a possible landing beach resulted in a strip of 500 yards on the beach 700 yards west of Cape Forok—six miles east of the Moem peninsula which forms the western arm of Dove Bay, and ten miles east of Wewak—being selected as Red Beach.

On the day of Wewak Force's full dress rehearsal of the landing at Wewak, Commodore Farncomb arrived by air at Hollandia—after having conferred with General Stevens at Dagua—and hoisted his broad pendant

<sup>8</sup> HMS *Newfoundland*, cruiser (1942), 8,000 tons, nine 6-in guns and ten 4-in AA guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 31½ kts.

<sup>9</sup> Dovers' report, when read at Navy Office in June 1945, was endorsed by the Director of Operations (Commander L. Gellatly) "S.O. Wewak Force appears to have handled his force with ability. His orders are clear and concise. His report well presented."

in *Hobart*. Next day, 9th May, that ship and *Warramunga* sailed thence for the scene of operations, as did *Newfoundland* and *Arunta* from Manus. At 6.30 a.m. on the 10th *Hobart* and *Warramunga* met *Swan* some 30 miles north of Wewak, and Dovers' operation orders were transferred to *Hobart*. Soon afterwards, *Newfoundland* and *Arunta* arrived at the rendezvous, and while *Swan* returned to But for the landing operation, the Wewak Support Force proceeded to carry out an afternoon bombardment of the Cape Moem peninsula area. At the conclusion of the bombardment the Support Force returned to sea, reversing course at 11.20 p.m. for the landing day bombardment. Meanwhile, at But, troops were embarked in *Dubbo*, *Colac* and landing craft before dark on the 10th, and Wewak Force, led by *Swan*, followed by *Colac*, A.L.C's, *Dubbo* and L.C.T's in that order, sailed at 11 p.m. for the assembly point, six miles N.E. by E. of the landing beach, and arrived there without incident at 6.55 a.m. on the 11th.

Weather at the opening of Wewak's D-day was marked by misty rain inshore, with poor but improving visibility as the meteorological disturbance moved eastwards. The Support Force, standing in for its pre-landing bombardment, observed Wewak Force approaching the assembly point at 6.30 a.m. *Colac* took charge of the assembly point while *Swan* proceeded to her bombardment position, and at 7.30 a.m. the pre-landing bombardment, by the Support Force, *Swan* and *Dubbo*, and strafing M.L's of Wewak Force, commenced. The landing, timed for 8.30 a.m., was carried out to schedule. The first wave of four landing craft grounded about 10 yards from the beach at 8.34, and the men waded ashore, a little to the west of the position planned.

In a chronological survey of events, *Hobart* recorded among them:

0745. All ships shooting including corvettes. There has been no sign of any retaliation from ashore and the target area has a pall of white smoke. . . . 0754. Landing craft are strung out in a line towards the shore. . . . 0815. Five M.L's are doing a strafing run on Red Beach. . . . 0840. First wave landed on beach—no opposition. . . . 0843. Wave 2 going ashore. Wave 3 approaching beach. Wave 1 discharges personnel. . . . 0847. Wave 1 leaving beach—no sign of enemy activity. 0849. Scheduled fire is completed. Ships are standing by for call fire. . . . 0911. Wave 4 on beach discharging personnel. . . . 0912. *Dubbo* firing on Forok Point. . . . 0919½. *Dubbo* has silenced opposition and troops have occupied position. 0920-0945. Received occasional reports from ashore—everything satisfactory.

*Swan* later recorded that the preliminary bombardment and strafing

was most effective and 89 dead Japanese were found after the landing in the area; it was the opinion of the officer in charge of landing troops that this had effectively silenced opposition on the beach and only light opposition was encountered on the flanks. One barge was hit on the run in by a 20-mm gun on Cape Forok and light machine-gun and mortar fire was encountered on the right flank. Our casualties were only one wounded. There were prepared defences in the form of three trench systems behind the beach but these were effectively shelled during the bombardment and the enemy withdrew. It is considered that if the preliminary bombardment had not been successful, there would have been strong opposition.

After dispatching the last assault wave from the assembly area, *Colac* joined the bombardment ships, and these stood by to answer calls for fire throughout the day, bombarding as necessary. At 5.05 p.m. the Support Group completed its bombardment program, and at 7 p.m. it set course for Hollandia, its mission of covering the overwater movement of Wewak Force from But to Wewak, and of providing the preliminary bombardment and fire support, successfully carried out.

Wewak Force remained in support of the 6th Division for most of May. From the 12th Dallman Harbour, just west of Cape Wom, became its base in place of But. The force carried out daily bombardments as requested, and strafed areas both on the mainland and islands. Typical extracts from Dovers' report of Wewak Force's activities are:

Tuesday, 15th May. *Swan* bombarded Cape Boram and a heavily defended gun position at 427001 which had been shelling the beach-head. *Bunbury* [Lieutenant Bleckman<sup>1</sup>] arrived with five new Bofors barrels for ML's as *Swan* was proceeding, and also bombarded Cape Boram with 30 rounds, after *Swan*. . . . Friday, 18th May. *Dubbo* and *Colac* with air spotting proceeded to engage gun which had fired on *ML427*. . . . On return to Dallman Harbour *Colac* proceeded towing *ML820* to Madang. [The M.L., whilst strafing Cape Moem during the dark hours on 16th May, struck a nigger-head and damaged her starboard propeller shaft.] . . . Tuesday, 22nd May, at 1430 two beach-head forward patrols called for fire support and *Swan* proceeded and engaged two enemy positions 200 yards SW of Brandi Plantation.

The campaign on shore proceeded with success. Early in May it was evident that the Japanese were abandoning Wewak and withdrawing their main forces southward over the Prince Alexander Mountains. Whilst an Australian force was sent on an encircling movement to counter the enemy's southward withdrawal, another advanced eastward through Wewak, and took Wewak Point on 10th May. The advance eastward continued, and on 20th May Boram airfield and foothills to the south were captured by the 2/8th Battalion and the coastal sector cleared towards Cape Moem. Wewak Force cooperated in the attack on the 20th. *Swan*, *Dubbo* and M.L's *816*, *804* and *808* sailed from Cape Wom at 5.45 a.m. and at 6.30 a.m. commenced a bombardment of targets in the Boram airfield area, and in the foothills. The M.L's strafed Cape Moem. All ships later stood by to answer calls for fire. The eastward advance of the 2/8th Battalion continued, and it occupied Cape Moem on 22nd May and made contact with Farida Force.

By the end of May the 6th Division had driven most of what remained of the *XVIII Japanese Army* away from the coast and into the mountains. *Swan* ended the month making a survey of Wewak Harbour, and on the 27th sailed for Madang. It was her last operation against the enemy in the war, though she had one more wartime mission to perform, that of towing a wounded companion to Australia.

The survey of Wewak subsequent to *Swan's* departure was continued by *Warrego*, which also provided some support bombardments for the

<sup>1</sup> Lt-Cdr J. F. Bleckman, RANR. Comd HMAS's *Yandra* 1943-44, *Bunbury* 1944-45. Merchant seaman; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 1 Jan 1920.

6th Division. After her participation in the landings at Zamboanga and Iloilo in March, *Warrego* spent April and May surveying Guiuan Naval Base, and re-establishing navigational lights in the Philippines. She was required for the forthcoming OBOE Two operation—the capture of Balikpapan—and for that was to report to Morotai on 20th June. She was in that port on 30th May, and proceeded thence to Wewak to commence surveying. She reached Wewak on 3rd June, and on the 5th, when CTG.70.5 (Commander Oom) was discussing the survey with General Stevens, Stevens raised the question of the possibility of *Warrego* bombarding some Japanese positions which could not be reached by army artillery. The necessary arrangements were made, and on Tuesday and Wednesday, 12th and 13th June, *Warrego* carried out bombardments of Forok Point—where patrols had been ambushed the previous Sunday—Forok village, and on other targets where concentrations of the enemy had been reported. Most of the targets required aircraft spotting, and this was arranged with No. 71 Wing R.A.A.F. based at Aitape. The bombardments were also helped by the presence on board of an army bombardment liaison officer, as in the earlier bombardments. The bombardments achieved excellent results, and Byrne, *Warrego*'s commanding officer, commented in his report:

There is no doubt that ships of *Warrego*'s class can be of great value to the army, in that important targets which the army cannot get at are readily brought under fire by ships steaming close inshore on the flanks of the army perimeter.

Survey of the Wewak area (carried out by *Warrego*'s boats while she was on bombardment duties) was completed by the afternoon of the 13th, and at 6 p.m. the ship sailed, and arrived at Morotai on the 17th, where Commander Little (CTG.70.5) joined, and reported for the OBOE Two attack.

#### IV

As mentioned, *Colac* left Wewak Force on 18th May and sailed for Madang, where she arrived on the 19th. This was to have been the first stage on her way to Australia for refit. Orders from N.O.I.C. New Guinea, however, deferred her return to Australia, and on 20th May she sailed from Madang for Torokina, where she arrived on the 23rd.

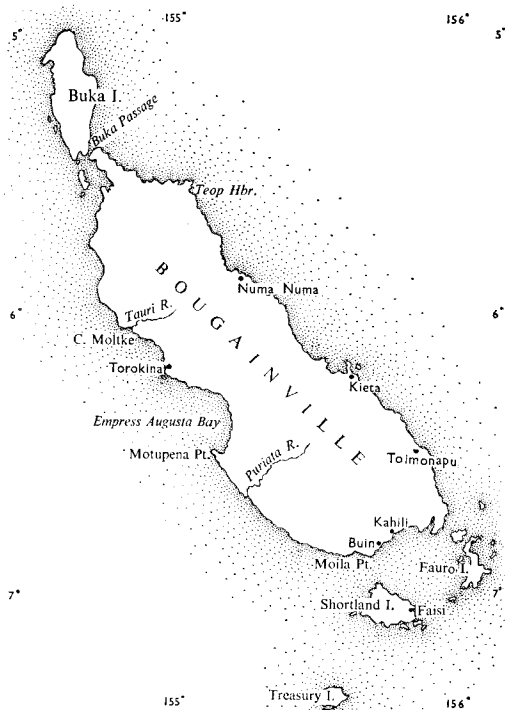
Her presence in Bougainville—as was explained to her commanding officer, Lieutenant Hopper, at a conference with II Australian Corps at Torokina—was needed for operations planned to stop transit of enemy troops from Choiseul Island to Bougainville, and to harass and destroy Japanese installations on north-eastern Bougainville. Allied Intelligence Bureau information indicated that Japanese troops were leaving Choiseul in barges for Bougainville; that Shortland and Fauro Islands were heavily defended by the enemy; and that coast defences were suspected in the Toimonapu area in south-east Bougainville. The Choiseul Bay area, in the north-west extremity of Choiseul Island, was clear of artillery so far as could be ascertained.

Hopper's operation orders from N.O.I.C. Torokina, covering the period 24th to 26th May, directed him to search for enemy barges in Bougainville Strait—between Bougainville and Choiseul—from midnight on the 24th to daylight on the 25th; to bombard targets at Porapora and in Choiseul Bay during the 25th; again carry out an anti-barge patrol in Bougainville Strait during the dark hours of the 25th-26th; and during the 26th to bombard targets at Toimonapu before repeating the bombardments of Porapora and Choiseul Bay. Lieut-Colonel Arthur<sup>2</sup> of II Australian Corps took passage for the operation, as did Lieutenant Seton of the A.I.B. Seton was to give advice on local conditions and targets. This he was well qualified to do, having had rich experience as a planter on Shortland Island and a coastwatcher on Choiseul.

*Colac* sailed from Torokina in the morning of the 24th and successfully carried out her various missions—though without detecting any barge traffic across Bougainville Strait—until the evening of the 26th. Enemy camp areas were bombarded at Porapora, Siposai Island and other targets in the vicinity of

Choiseul Bay on the 25th. On the 26th the bombardments at Luluai Point and Toimonapu Plantation on Bougainville were, according to the spotting aircraft, marked by "excellent shooting and the area well covered".

At 6 p.m. on 26th May *Colac* arrived off Emerald Entrance, Choiseul Bay, for a repeat bombardment of that area. Intelligence from A.I.B. commenting on the effectiveness of the previous day's bombardment reported in detail the position of Japanese small craft and camp areas on Kondakanimboka Island at the northern end of Choiseul Bay, and of a camp area on Terekukure Plantation, a point opposite the Emerald Entrance. Entering the bay through Emerald Entrance, Hopper intended



Bougainville Island

<sup>2</sup> Brig. A. E. Arthur, DSO, ED, 2/2 Fd Regt; Staff Officer (Intelligence) HQ RAA II Corps 1944-45; CRA 11 and 5 Divs 1945. Draftsman; of Burwood, Vic; b. Royal Park, Vic, 30 Aug 1909.

to deal with the northern targets first—since daylight was now limited by time—and then return southward and bombard the Terekukure camp on his way out of the bay.

Fire was opened on the way in, at 6.5 p.m., on Siposai Island, the southern shore of the entrance, with several rounds of 4-inch and small-arms fire. Then, as *Colac* started to round Parama Island, the northern shore of the entrance, to head north up the bay, two shells from a gun on Terekukure Plantation passed over her and landed on Parama. Wheel was put hard a'starboard and *Colac* turned towards, and silenced, the enemy gun—at a range of about 1,300 yards—with ten rounds of 4-inch from the gun on her forecastle, fired in about 30 seconds. Fire was then shifted left to cover the whole plantation area. The ship was still swinging to starboard since it was now intended, in view of the presence of enemy artillery, to retire at speed through Emerald Entrance as soon as the gun would not bear, and complete the bombardment from outside.

*Colac* was beam on to Terekukure when, at 6.15 p.m., an enemy shell fell close astern, and almost immediately she suffered a hit on the port side of the quarter-deck, which caused casualties but negligible damage. A second hit reversed this and, causing no casualties, holed the engine room on the port side at the waterline. *Colac* then headed out through the Emerald Entrance at 6.20 p.m., bombarding and strafing Siposai and Parama Islands as she did so. At 6.23, as the last fall of enemy shot was sighted off the starboard bow, a message from the engine room reported that it was flooding rapidly through a hole, three feet by two feet, and at 6.25, as the ship cleared Emerald Entrance, the engine room had to be abandoned.

At 6.30 p.m. *Colac* was settling rapidly by the stern. But despite the flooded engine room the engines continued to give her four to five knots, and it became apparent that the bulkheads were holding and that flooding was confined to the engine room. N.O.I.C. Torokina was asked for assistance, and course was set for Treasury Island. At 9.25 p.m. the engines stopped, due to salting up. A collision mat was positioned and a hand pump was started on seepage into the boiler room. At 1.20 a.m. on 27th May *Colac* anchored in 17 fathoms about 10 miles east of Fauro Island. Thence she was towed, at 6.30 p.m. on the 27th, to Treasury Island where she arrived at 11 p.m. on the 28th.

Four casualties, two of them fatal, were suffered in this encounter.<sup>3</sup> This marked the end of the war for *Colac*. At Treasury Island temporary repairs were carried out by the salvage ship *Caledonian Salvor* (1,360 tons) which, from 1st to 3rd June, towed *Colac* to Finschhafen, screened on the voyage by H.M.A.S. *Lithgow*. On 7th June *Swan* took *Colac* in tow from Finschhafen and on the 18th the two ships arrived at Sydney. They were both in dockyard hands when hostilities ceased in August 1945.

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<sup>3</sup> Steward B. M. P. Shute was killed and AB S. R. Smith died of wounds. Stoker H. L. Fisher and AB S. Ingham were slightly wounded.



## CHAPTER 25

### R.A.N. SURVEY KEY TO BRUNEI

THE OBOE plan, as it was named, and which visualised the furtherance of the South-West Pacific campaign by the recapture of Borneo and the Netherlands East Indies was, as conceived in February 1945, in six parts. OBOE ONE, as mentioned, was the attack on Tarakan Island. OBOE TWO was to be an attack on Balikpapan on 18th May. The capture of this port would not only secure the oilfields, but would also provide an advanced base for the occupation on 28th May of Bandjermasin (OBOE THREE) on Borneo's south coast. With air support from Bandjermasin, or from British carriers if available, would come the major operation of the series, OBOE FOUR, the invasion of Java by Australian troops, and the seizure of the Surabaya area on 27th June, with advances thence west to Bandung and Batavia and east to Lombok Strait. OBOE FIVE would be the consolidation of the remaining areas of the Netherlands East Indies, and OBOE SIX the occupation of the remaining areas of Borneo. Subsequently operations OBOE THREE, FOUR and FIVE were cancelled and a further landing on Borneo, at Brunei Bay, was planned for 23rd May as OBOE SIX which thus—out of numerical order in the OBOE series—became the next target on the Borneo list.

Brunei (2,226 square miles) on Borneo's north-west coast, a native state under British protection, was bordered on the north-west by the sea, and otherwise by the British Crown Colony of Sarawak (47,000 square miles) in which territory it formed a double pocket just west of Sarawak's border with the other British Crown Colony of British North Borneo (29,387 square miles). Generally the area, partly swampy, was drained by small, short streams, and the coastal plain was accessible from sandy beaches. The coastal lowlands extended in undulating plains some five miles to the rugged, steep, densely forested mountains of the interior. There were large rubber plantations south of Brunei town. The oilfields were at Seria, some 60 miles south-west of Brunei town, and Miri, about 30 miles farther on.

The town—and port—of Brunei lay at the extremity of an arm of Brunei Bay, reaching some 20 miles into the land from the south-west corner of the main bay. This was itself a large rectangular body of water, approximately 20 miles square, and extending south-easterly from the island's north-west coastline. Its portals were the southern tip of the Klias Peninsula to the north-east, and Brunei Bluff to the south-west. Lying about midway in the entrance to Brunei Bay was the equilateral triangle of Labuan Island (35 square miles) which was part of British North Borneo, the boundary between which territory and that of Sarawak bisected Brunei Bay. Midway along the southern base of Labuan was Victoria Harbour, providing the best port facilities in the area, with

three timber wharves, and sheltered anchorage for a limited number of cruisers and destroyers.

Just east of Brunei Bluff, and partially closing the entrance to the south-west arm of Brunei Bay and thus the approach to the town of Brunei, was the small island of Muara, flat, partly swampy, and possessing four T-shaped jetties extending into the channel, suitable for berthing cargo ships (AK's). There were two Japanese airstrips, one at Miri and one on Labuan. Both had been heavily hit in Allied air attacks, and were classed as non-operational.

Borneo's value to the Japanese had been largely as a source of raw materials: oil, rubber, copper and coal. An added attraction at Brunei was the large bay, of which the Japanese had long made use as a fleet anchorage, and which they planned to develop into a naval base. It was estimated that a naval base force of some 500 to 700 would form part of the 2,000 to 2,500 enemy troops considered to constitute the ground strength in the Brunei Bay-Labuan area. Though Japanese naval forces of three heavy (two damaged) and one light cruiser and four to six destroyers were known to be deployed in the Singapore-N.E.I. area, it was thought improbable that these would attempt a raid on Allied forces operating in the Brunei Bay area. Japanese naval reaction to an Allied landing was expected to be limited to harassing attacks by small suicide boats and to light submarine activity. Mines had been laid in the Brunei Bay area and in Balabac Strait, between North Borneo and Palawan Island, by both the Allies and the Japanese. This necessitated extensive—and in the event fruitful—minesweeping.

The tasks assigned to the Allied participants in OBOE SIX were: "Destroy hostile garrison and secure the Brunei Bay area and consolidate that part of the Brunei Bay area necessary to permit establishment of an advanced fleet base and to protect oil and rubber resources therein." As at Tarakan, Admiral Royal was the naval commander in direct command of the operation, and the landing force—of the 20th (Brigadier Windeyer) and 24th (Brigadier Porter<sup>1</sup>) Brigade Groups of the 9th Division—was commanded by General Wootten. Air Vice-Marshal Bostock commanded the Allied Air Forces concerned and Admiral Berkey commanded the Cruiser Covering Force, TF.74.3, comprising *Nashville* (Flag), *Phoenix*, *Boise*, H.M.A.S. *Hobart* and five destroyers, including H.M.A.S. *Arunta*.

Planning for the operation, which was originally to be a landing on 23rd May, commenced at Morotai on the 2nd of that month. Inability to assemble all the troops, equipment and supplies at the staging area in time for the projected date necessitated postponement of the operation for seventeen days, so that "Zebra-day"—as it was termed—became 10th June. Three beaches were selected for landing points—one, Brown Beach on Labuan Island, extending from Victoria town to Ramsay Point, a distance of about 1,200 yards. The other two beaches were about 20 miles

<sup>1</sup> Maj-Gen S. H. W. C. Porter, CBE, DSO, ED, 2/5 Bn; CO 2/6 Bn 1941, 2/31 Bn 1941-42; comd 30 Bde 1942-43, 24 Bde 1943-45. Commissioner of Police, Victoria, 1954-63. Bank officer; of Wangaratta, Vic; b. Tintaldra, Vic, 23 Feb 1905. Died 9 Oct 1963.

distant from Brown Beach, in the vicinity of Brunei town—White Beach on Muara Island, extending some 1,000 yards northward from Cape Sapo, and Green Beach, lying about one mile to the eastward of Brunei Bluff. (There was also Yellow Beach on the eastern point of Brunei Peninsula, which was a safe all-weather beach for landing equipment, but was not a suitable assault beach.) Because of the distance between the two sets of assault beaches, it was decided to have two separate assault units. The Brown Beach landing on Labuan at Victoria Harbour would be made by the 24th Brigade on a two-battalion front; those on Green Beach and on White Beach would be made by the 20th Brigade.

It will be recalled that, of the Australian ships which participated in the Tarakan operation, *Barcoo* was the last to leave that island. She sailed on the last day of May 1945 as Senior Officer of Echelon OBOE SIX A, consisting of 10 L.C.T's and 44 L.C.M's, bound for Brunei. This group was one of the first converging on this second Borneo target to set out for its destination. In the afternoon of 1st June the group arrived at Tawitawi and anchored in the bay, where it remained until sailing for Balabac at 7 a.m. on the 4th. At that time, some 400 miles to the south-east, another group of ships was at sea making for Brunei. This was the Minesweeping and Hydrographic Group. Its departure on 2nd June from Morotai was recorded by Lieut-Commander Tancred in *Lachlan*: "At 1200 departed Morotai in convoy with 50 minesweeping and fire support craft en route for Brunei Bay. Hydrographic Unit (Task Unit 78.1.6) consisting of H.M.A.S. *Lachlan*, U.S.S. *YMS160*<sup>2</sup> and U.S.S. *Satinleaf*."<sup>3</sup>

It was on 4th June, too, that the Brunei Attack Group, commanded by Admiral Royal in U.S.S. *Rocky Mount*, sailed from Morotai. The assault echelon was of 85 ships—including 34 L.S.T's, 22 L.C.I's, 22 L.C.M's and the Australian L.S.I's *Manoora*, *Kanimbla* and *Westralia*. The attack group sailed from Morotai Harbour around noon and Commander Bunyan, in *Kanimbla*, left a picture of its departure in his Action Report:

At 1205 anchor was weighed and *Kanimbla* proceeded from Morotai Harbour in line ahead, courses and speeds requisite to assume cruising formation, and at 1438 ship was in station, *Kanimbla*, *Titania*,<sup>4</sup> *Manoora*, *Rocky Mount*, *Westralia*, *Carter Hall* and *Lloyd*<sup>5</sup> [a destroyer transport, Flagship of a flotilla of five] leading lines of L.S.T's, L.C.I's, L.S.M's and other vessels of the Brunei Attack Group. *Kanimbla* in station as leader of column 7. The Attack Group was escorted by U.S. Ships *Caldwell*, *Bancroft*,<sup>6</sup> *Jobb*, *Robinson*, *Philip*,<sup>7</sup> *Day*,<sup>8</sup> *Edwards*,<sup>9</sup> *Grant*, *Killen*, *PC1132*,<sup>1</sup> *SC741* and *SC732*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *YMS160*, US motor minesweeper (1942-45), 207 tons, one 3-in gun, 13 kts.

<sup>3</sup> *Satinleaf*, US net laying ship (1944), 1,100 tons.

<sup>4</sup> *Titania*, US attack cargo ship (1942), 7,047 tons.

<sup>5</sup> *Lloyd*, US high speed transport (1944), 1,400 tons.

<sup>6</sup> *Caldwell*, *Bancroft*, US destroyers (1942), 1,620 tons, four 5-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

<sup>7</sup> *Robinson*, *Philip*, US destroyers (1942-44), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

<sup>8</sup> *Jobb*, *Day*, US destroyer-escorts (1944), two 5-in guns, three 21-in torpedo tubes, 24 kts.

<sup>9</sup> *Edwards*, US destroyer (1942), 1,630 tons, four 5-in guns, five 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts.

<sup>1</sup> *PC1132*, US submarine chaser (1942-44), 280 tons, one or two 3-in guns, 18 kts.

<sup>2</sup> *SC741*, *SC732*, US submarine chasers (1942-44), 95 tons, one 40-mm gun, 20 kts.

The voyage through the Celebes and Sulu Seas was made in fair weather and the attack group "overcame the navigational difficulties presented by Basilan and Balabac Straits without mishap".<sup>3</sup> Air protection was provided and dawn and dusk alerts maintained, but no enemy aircraft appeared and no submarine contacts were reported.

Three more groups sailed on 5th June. One was a reinforcement echelon of L.S.T's and L.C.I's and five merchant ships with destroyer escort, which sailed from Morotai. From Subic Bay at 8.30 a.m. the Cruiser Covering Group sailed—Rear-Admiral Berkey in *Nashville*, with U.S.S. *Phoenix*, H.M.A.S. *Hobart*, U.S. destroyers *Conner*, *Burns*, *Charrette* and *Bell*,<sup>4</sup> and H.M.A.S. *Arunta*. And from Leyte there departed H.M.A.S. *Hawkesbury*, with a slow tow convoy.

First arrival at Brunei Bay at dawn on 7th June was the Minesweeping and Hydrographic Group. It was followed within an hour or so by the Cruiser Covering Group, which covered the minesweepers sweeping the approaches to the bay. *Lachlan* laid channel approach buoys and carried out check soundings of the approaches. Next day, the 8th, *Phoenix*, *Conner*, *Hobart*, *Charrette* and *Burns* carried out the first scheduled bombardments, which were accompanied by air bombing. *Hobart* fired 65 rounds of 6-inch at targets on the eastern end of Muara Island. *Lachlan*'s boat "with Lieutenant A. H. Cooper,<sup>5</sup> R.A.N., in charge, proceeded to lay buoys in and near Victoria Harbour while the naval bombardment and air bombing was at its height". *Lachlan* herself carried out close inshore reconnaissance of Green Beach, placing marking buoys within 30 yards of the beach. This day the Allies suffered the only ship casualty in the operation. The minesweeper U.S.S. *Salute*<sup>6</sup> struck a mine, suffered extensive hull damage from which she sank, and had four men killed and 37 wounded.

On the 8th the Attack Group passed through Balabac Strait and in the afternoon saw *Barcoo* in Balabac Harbour. Here the group was joined by U.S.S. *Willoughby*<sup>7</sup> and 10 P.T. boats.

Next day, the 9th — Z-1 day — dawned clear and calm at Brunei, with gentle variable winds and smooth sea with little or no swell. *Lachlan* entered harbour at dawn, carried out a close reconnaissance of White Beach, covered by supporting fire from landing craft, and then surveyed and buoyed the narrow channel south of Muara Island to Brooketon. This survey was scheduled to take place after the capture of Muara Island on Z-day, but, Tancred recorded:

I decided that the whole assault would be speeded and traffic cleared to Brooketon without delay if this survey was completed on Z—1-day. *Lachlan*'s boats, with myself,

<sup>3</sup> Report of Commander Amphibious Group Six, TG.78.1.

<sup>4</sup> *Conner*, *Burns*, *Charrette* and *Bell*, US destroyers (1943), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

<sup>5</sup> Capt A. H. Cooper, RAN, HMAS's *Hobart*, *Perth*, *Nepal*, *Benalla*, *Lachlan*. Of Greenwich Point, NSW; b. Burwood, NSW, 29 Apr 1920.

<sup>6</sup> *Salute*, US minesweeper (1943), 625 tons, one 3-in gun, 15 kts. Sunk Brunei Bay, 8 Jun 1945.

<sup>7</sup> *Willoughby*, US motor torpedo boat tender (1944), 1,760 tons.

Lieutenant C. H. McGee<sup>8</sup> . . . and Lieutenant W. J. Starkey<sup>9</sup> . . . in charge, and with two L.C.S(L)'s, two L.C.I(G)'s and *YMS160* rendering close fire support, went into the channel and completed the survey. Two destroyers detailed by CTG.74.3 to cover the operation dropped shells dangerously close to the boats, but with the exception of two shots from the shore at one of *Lachlan*'s boats just north of Brooketon, no enemy resistance was experienced. The latter part of the operation was carried out in the smoke from the intensive bombing of Brooketon by formations of Liberators.

During all this, one of the L.C.I's grounded when the boats were being withdrawn from the channel and *Lachlan* spent the night of Z—1-day "feeling rather lonely" anchored 500 yards off Cape Sapo, Muara Island, to give support if necessary. The Cruiser Covering Group entered Brunei Bay at 8 a.m. on the 9th and carried out scheduled bombardments. Of the Australian ships, *Hobart* had no targets this day but *Arunta*, in the afternoon, carried out scheduled bombardments in the Brunei Bluff area.

Meanwhile the Attack Group, approaching Brunei, was joined in the afternoon of the 9th by U.S.S. *Boise* with General MacArthur on board, escorted by destroyers *Killen* and *Albert W. Grant*. News received this day minimised the possibility of any Japanese naval attack. CTG.78.1, commander of the Attack Group, recorded:

On 9 June it was learned that the Japanese heavy cruiser, *Ashigara*, had been sunk at 1242, 8 June, by the British submarine *Trenchant*, in position 1 degree 59 minutes South, 104 degrees 57 minutes East [off Sumatra, just at the northern entrance to Banka Strait]. This removed almost beyond peradventure the possibility of a surprise sortie by enemy fleet units against our forces at Brunei Bay.

## II

Sunday, 10th June, Z-day at Brunei, dawned with a clear sky ushering in a calm day. The ships of the Cruiser Covering Group were already in position in their firing areas, having entered the bay at 2.30 a.m. Two hours later the approaching Attack Group executed the "Deploy" signal entering the bay. The Green and White Beach units—*Kanimbla*, 17 landing craft, and *Lloyd* with her four other destroyer transports—detached and altered 90 degrees to starboard to their destinations. And at 5.30 a.m. *Kanimbla* recorded "starboard anchor let go in 15 fathoms". The main body of the Attack Group with *Rocky Mount*, *Manoora*, *Westralia*, *Titania*, *Carter Hall* and 30 landing craft went to Brown Beach, Labuan, and at 6.18 a.m. CTG.78.1 recorded in his report: "*Manoora*, *Titania* and *Westralia* were observed to be on station in the transport area in the dim morning light." The only immediate enemy reaction was the arrival over the transport area, at 6.51, of a Japanese aircraft which dropped a bomb. This landed between *Titania* and an L.S.T., and did no damage. At 7 a.m., said the report, "at first light all ships making assault landings on Brown Beach were observed anchored on proper stations in the transport area".

<sup>8</sup> Lt C. H. McGee, DSC; RANR. HMAS's *Manoora*, *Stella*, *Polaris*, *Warrego*, *Gascoyne* and *Lachlan*. Of Clarence Gardens, SA; b. Glenelg, SA, 8 Jan 1920.

<sup>9</sup> Lt W. J. Starkey, RANR. HMAS's *Shepparton*, *Stella*, *Warrego*, *Gascoyne* and *Lachlan*. Of Sydney; b. Chatswood, NSW, 6 May 1919.

At Brown Beach *Westralia* commenced lowering boats at 6.50 a.m., and disembarkation of troops commenced ten minutes later. *Manoora* (recorded CTG.78.1) "lowered boats at 7.8, troops were boated, and boats stood by". Across at Green Beach, *Kanimbla*'s record shows: "8.7 a.m. all boats away and troops for Green Beach assault embarking. Embarkation completed at 8.52 and all boats clear of the ship." At 8.15 the bombardment groups commenced their pre-assault bombardment of the three beaches. Of the Australian ships, *Hobart* fired 549 rounds of 6-inch and 461 of 4-inch at targets on Labuan Island. *Arunta* was at Green Beach where, between 8.45 and 9.45 she fired 600 rounds of 4.7-inch, and later reported "the areas were very well covered". The bombardment by the Cruiser Covering Group was joined by that of the Attack Group support craft and by aerial bombings by aircraft.

With its first wave dispatched at 8.45 a.m., Brown Beach was ahead of White by 11 minutes, and White in its turn anticipated the first wave at Green Beach—at 9.6 a.m.—by 10 minutes. At 9.14 and 9.15 respectively the first waves landed on Brown and Green Beaches, and one minute later, at 9.16 a.m., the first wave landed on White Beach, which was reported captured 16 minutes later, with no opposition. Green Beach was in the invaders' hands by 10.3 a.m., and, as at the inner beaches, Brown Beach was also captured without opposition. As was the case at Tarakan, R.A.N. Beach Commandos did a valuable job on the Brunei beaches. Under Lieut-Commander McKauge,<sup>1</sup> they comprised 20 officers and 157 ratings. In the early phases of the Brunei operation a U.S.N. beaching officer and U.S.N. beaching party selected the L.S.T. and L.S.M. landing slots. This arrangement was unsuccessful, and R.A.N. Commandos took over from them. Commenting on this, and on the work of the Beach Commandos, General Northcott, Chief of the General Staff, said in a letter to Admiral Royle, the Chief of the Naval Staff: "There is general satisfaction in forward areas with the work of R.A.N. Commandos."

*Lachlan* spent Z-day in the Green Beach area, and recorded her activities in the brief entry: "10th June, Z-day. After an intense preliminary naval and air bombardment, the assault waves of the 9th Division, A.I.F., went in at Muara Island, Victoria, and west of Brunei Bluff. Proceeded with buoying and rapid survey of Anson Passage north of Muara Island." *Barcoo* and her convoy of landing craft arrived at Brunei Bay at 12 noon on Z-day and entered Victoria Harbour. Here the convoy dispersed to anchorage, and *Barcoo* took up patrol duties. *Hawkesbury* at this stage was still in Balabac Strait with her convoy, making for Brunei.

On shore, progress was rapid, with little or no early opposition. At 11.4 a.m. on Z-day, Brigadier Porter assumed command of his troops ashore at Labuan, and a few minutes later General MacArthur, with Admiral Royal, General Morshead and General Kenney, embarked in an

<sup>1</sup> Lt-Cdr R. McKauge, DSC; RANVR. RN 1940-44 (HMS's *Quebec* and *Saunders*); Principal Beachmaster, RAN Commando Beach Unit, Brunei 1945. Railways clerk; of Sandgate, Qld; b. Laidley, Qld, 22 Nov 1909.

L.C.V.P. from U.S.S. *Boise* and went in to inspect the Labuan beaches. In the afternoon, at 3.45, Brigadier Windeyer assumed command ashore at White, Green and Yellow Beaches. General Wootten and his staff disembarked from *Rocky Mount* at 5 p.m., to set up headquarters on shore, and General Wootten assumed command there at 6.30 p.m. Unloading of supplies proceeded with dispatch, and the three Australian L.S.I's, U.S. Ships *Titania* and *Carter Hall*, the five destroyer transports, and 24 landing craft of the Attack Group, were all unloaded on Z-day. With disembarkation and unloading completed<sup>2</sup> the ships anchored for the night, and at 2.26 p.m. on the 11th, *Manoora*, *Westralia*, *Kanimbla* and U.S.S. *Titania* sailed for Morotai, escorted by three destroyers.

After her participation in the bombardments on Z-day, *Arunta* had no further immediate calls for fire. *Hobart* also had a quiet day on 11th June, but on the 12th carried out call fire bombardments in the forenoon on Cape Klias—the northern extremity of Brunei Bay—in which she fired 102 rounds of 6-inch, reporting: "The area was well covered and direct hits were obtained on a large warehouse and building." At 6.30 p.m. that day the two Australian ships, *Hobart* and *Arunta*, sailed from Victoria Harbour, Labuan, for Tawitawi. The exodus from Brunei at this period was seen by *Hawkesbury* and her slow convoy, still making for Brunei Bay—where they arrived on the 14th—and Weston, *Hawkesbury's* commanding officer, recorded in his Letter of Proceedings:

Considerable traffic was encountered after clearing Balabac Strait at 3.2 p.m. on the 11th, consisting of warship and transport echelons retiring from the invasion beaches of Brunei Bay and included H.M.A. Ships *Hobart* and *Arunta* at 3.15 a.m. on the 13th and L.S.I's *Manoora*, *Westralia* and *Kanimbla* in echelon 0-6-J at 4.30 a.m. on the 12th.

*Hobart* and *Arunta* arrived at Tawitawi on 14th June, and there found *Shropshire*—who had arrived the previous day after her refit in Australia—and Commodore Farncomb transferred his broad pendant to her from *Hobart*. After replenishing provisions, ammunition and fuel, the group sailed at 4.30 p.m. on the 15th to return to Brunei Bay. The Brunei report of CTG.74.3, Rear-Admiral Berkey, recorded the group's arrival at Brunei in the forenoon of Sunday, 17th June: "0945 CTG.74.1 in *Shropshire*, who joined his Task Group at Tawitawi, with *Hobart* and *Arunta*, stood into Brunei Bay from Tawitawi and anchored." Farncomb attended a conference with Berkey and Rear-Admiral Royal in *Rocky Mount*, and at 6.36 p.m. that day TG.74.3 sailed for Tawitawi, and "relinquished responsibility for naval gunfire support in OBOE Six objective area to CTG.74.1 (CCAS) in *Shropshire* with *Hobart*, *Arunta* and U.S. Ships *Hart* and *Metcalf*".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> As an example, *Kanimbla* disembarked 80 officers and 1,199 other ranks, and discharged 320 tons of cargo. Total working hours to complete all unloading—5 hours 26 minutes. Bunyan, *Kanimbla's* commanding officer, remarked in his report: "During the period that the troops were on board, their conduct and behaviour was exemplary."

<sup>3</sup> *Metcalf*, *Hart*, US destroyers (1944), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

## III

*Shropshire* carried out bombardments against enemy strongpoints on Labuan Island on 18th and 19th June. The bombardments—which were of the Pocket, an area one mile north of Victoria Harbour and one mile west of Labuan airfield, and the only unsubdued part of the island—were with aircraft spotting, and on both days results were evaluated as “Highly satisfactory”. The Pocket fell to the Australians on the 21st. Meanwhile, on the 19th, Farncomb shifted his broad pendant to *Arunta* and at 6 p.m., with U.S. Ships *Metcalf* and *Hart* in company, sailed for the Miri-Lutong area, some 90 miles W.S.W. of Brunei Bay, and about 30 miles beyond Seria. With the subjection of Brunei and Labuan—except for the Pocket—by 16th June, the landing of a reinforced battalion at Miri was ordered, and the task of the three destroyers was to escort and cover the landing force, and supply support bombardments. A group of minesweepers was operating off Miri-Lutong under difficulties due to the condition of their sweep gear, this being damaged by exploding mines. The area had been thickly sown. On 18th June the group swept 11 mines, bringing the total swept to 387. It was because air spotting was not available, and because of the possible danger from mines, that Farncomb decided not to take the two cruisers to Miri-Lutong.

The landing force—the 2/13th Battalion Group, about 1,900 strong—was carried from Brunei Bay in TU.76.20.50, comprising several landing and assault craft, L.S.T's, L.C.I's, etc. The force rendezvoused off the entrance to Brunei Bay in the afternoon of the 19th. Passage to Miri-Lutong was uneventful—except for the troops who were “very crowded on the decks of the L.S.T's and were most uncomfortable when the wind increased and the sea became very rough”.<sup>4</sup> Before dawn on the 20th they could see on the eastern horizon the huge fires of the oil wells at Seria, which the Japanese had set ablaze.

The ships opened fire at 8.30 a.m. on scheduled targets in the Lutong area, and at 9.30 the first wave of troops landed unopposed. “The objectives were reached without any Japanese being seen.”<sup>5</sup> The ships provided the planned bombardments, and during the night of 20th-21st June, *Metcalf* carried out harassing fire at Miri, while *Arunta* and *Hart* retired to sea. In a signal to Admiral Kinkaid on the 21st Farncomb said:

Destroyers of this group provided cover and supported landing Lutong area. Fired total of 1,400 rounds main armament preliminary bombardments and 100 rounds interdicting fire during night. Covering positions now secured. Enemy detachments in adjacent areas reported by natives but no contact has been made. No calls for fire today 21 June. Am now withdrawing to Brunei Bay to rejoin cruisers and fuel from *Winooski*.<sup>6</sup> On completion intend task group to sail to Tawitawi.

This was the final participation of TG.74.1 in the OBOE SIX operation. The three destroyers left the Miri-Lutong area at 6 p.m. on 21st June,

<sup>4</sup> Long, *The Final Campaigns*, p. 486.

<sup>5</sup> Long, p. 487.

<sup>6</sup> *Winooski*, US oiler (1942), 5,580 tons.



by which time, as Farncomb recorded in the squadron's Report of Proceedings, "the destruction of a further 22 mines by the sweepers had been witnessed. This brought the total swept in this area to over 400." Back in Brunei Bay at 7 a.m. on the 22nd Farncomb re-hoisted his broad pendant in *Shropshire*, and at 6 p.m. TG.74.1—*Shropshire*, *Hobart*, *Arunta*, *Hart* and *Metcalf*—sailed for Tawitawi where it arrived at 8.30 a.m. on 24th June. At 1.30 a.m. on 26th June the Task Group sailed to take up duties in OBOE TWO operation, the assault on Balikpapan.

Of the other Australian ships, the three L.S.I's, as stated above, sailed from Brunei Bay on 11th June for Morotai. They played no further part in OBOE SIX but, at Morotai, prepared to participate in the forthcoming OBOE TWO operation. The three frigates, however, were employed on OBOE SIX duties until the end of June. *Barcoo*, who spent most of the month escorting, and patrolling Brunei Bay, sailed thence on 2nd July for Morotai. *Hawkesbury*, similarly employed after her arrival at Brunei Bay on 14th June, also left there on 2nd July as one of the escorts of an L.S.T. echelon to Morotai.

*Lachlan* had a busy time, and was concerned in various subsidiary landings at Brunei Bay in addition to her survey work. On 15th June, in preparation for the assault two days later on Weston, a small town on the mainland on the eastern extremity of Brunei Bay, she anchored off the mouth of the Padas River, while her boats, with Lieut-Commander Tancred and Lieutenant Cooper in charge, and with *YMS160* assisting and *LCS60* in support, surveyed and buoyed the channel as far as Batu Batu Point. Whilst on this mission a native canoe was seized and its occupant, closely questioned, stated that the Japanese had retired from Weston. This information, which was contrary to all Intelligence reports, was reported by Tancred to Rear-Admiral Royal when *Lachlan* returned to Victoria Harbour that afternoon. Tancred accompanied Admiral Royal to General Wootten's headquarters and after a conference there it was decided to cancel the preliminary naval and air bombardments of Weston and to continue the survey of the Padas River to Weston next day, taking with the surveying boats two A.I.F. scouts.

This survey from Batu Batu Point to Weston was carried out next day, 16th June, by *Lachlan*'s boats—with Tancred and Cooper in charge, as before—covered by two L.C.I(G)'s. Again a native was seized for questioning and retained on board one of the boats, much against his will. Tancred recorded in his Report of Surveying Proceedings:

He stated that Japanese forces had vacated Weston, but his cries of "Beware, beware", as we approached the village were a little disturbing. The Japanese had gone, however, and on completing the survey at 12.30, a boat went alongside the railway escarpment at Weston and put the scouts ashore. No sign of enemy troops was found. On return of the landing party, the naval force retired down the river.

Next day, the 17th, *Lachlan*'s Lieutenant Starkey piloted the assault craft up the Padas River to Weston. On the 18th her boats, with Tancred and Cooper in charge, surveyed and buoyed the channel to Mempakul,

at the entrance to the Klias River and on the tip of Klias Peninsula. Mepakul was to be the military objective on the 19th. The survey was completed by noon. Interrogated natives said that 50 Japanese troops and two officers had recently left Mepakul, and after a brief investigation of the village—where very recent traces of Japanese occupation were found—the naval forces retired. At the request of Captain Arison, U.S.N., the Amphibious Attack Force commander for the Mepakul assault, Tancred acted as pilot of the landing craft at the attack on the 19th. This was carried out without incident and was unopposed, and 750 Australian troops occupied Mepakul. *Lachlan* then proceeded to Muara Island to commence survey and marking of Brunei River.

Her part at Brunei was recognised and commended in a signal to Tancred from Admiral Royal, before his departure from the South-West Pacific on 17th June:

Your seamanlike and efficient performance both here at Brunei and at Tarakan has been a source of great pleasure to me and should be one of great pride to you. You have a well organised, courageous and efficient crew. To you I give the highest of naval praise. Well done.

## CHAPTER 26

### AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST AMPHIBIOUS ATTACK— BALIKPAPAN

AT midnight on 23rd January 1942 thirteen Japanese transports, “silhouetted from seaward against the flare and glow from the burning oilfields on shore”, anchored off Balikpapan on the south-east coast of Borneo. Three hours later they were attacked with torpedoes and gunfire by the four American destroyers, *John D. Ford*, *Pope*, *Parrott* and *Paul Jones*, in the first American surface action in the Pacific campaign of the Second World War; “indeed, the first undertaken by the United States Navy since 1898”. Four of the Japanese transports were sunk, but the American attack failed to check the Japanese progress in Borneo. At dawn on 24th January they began landing at Balikpapan. “No opposition was encountered on shore, and on the 28th of the month the 23rd Air Flotilla was established on the airfields there.”<sup>1</sup>

About 7 a.m. on Sunday, 1st July 1945, the Allied assault echelon of nearly 150 ships, including the Australian L.S.I's *Manoora*, *Kanimbla* and *Westralia*, arrived at Balikpapan in the final amphibious operation of the war in the Pacific. As was so three and a half years earlier, there was the “flare and glow from the burning oilfields on shore”. “0713 Oil fire observed ashore bearing 324 degrees T. 0715 Second oil fire observed ashore bearing 318 degrees T.”<sup>2</sup> But now the tide of war had changed and was running at full flood for the Allies. There were no Japanese naval forces to contest their invasion and two hours later the first of the Australian soldiers of the 7th Division landed.

The last amphibious assault necessary to recapture the key points on the island of Borneo, and the last of the Second World War, the Balikpapan operation—OBOE TWO—was ordered for the purpose of seizing and occupying the area in order to establish naval, air and logistic facilities, and to conserve the petroleum producing and processing installations there.

Balikpapan, with an output of some 15,000,000 barrels a year was, after Palembang in Sumatra, the most productive oil port in east Asia. On the south-east coast of Borneo on Macassar Strait, approximately the same distance (220 miles) from the southernmost point of the island as Tarakan was from the northernmost, Balikpapan lay on the south-western shore of a peninsula forming the eastern side of Balikpapan Bay, a deep estuary of several rivers. From the extremity of the peninsula, on the southern tip of which the European suburb of Klandasan faced the open sea, the coast ran in a gentle curve north-east. On the narrow coastal plain some seven miles east of the peninsula's tip was the town of Sepinggang, and six miles farther to the north-east, that of Manggar. There

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<sup>1</sup> *Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942*, pp. 534-5.

<sup>2</sup> CTG.78.2 Action Report.

was an airfield at Sepinggang, and two at Manggar. The country was open around Balikpapan, with hills rising from the coastal plain to about 700 feet. Farther inland the jungle began.

F-day, as that of the Balikpapan assault was designated, was set as 1st July 1945, by Operation Instructions 103/45 issued by G.H.Q., S.W.P.A. Vice-Admiral Barbey, Commander VII Amphibious Force, was designated Commander Balikpapan Attack Force. Preliminary naval planning for the operation began early in May, when Commander Amphibious Group Eight, Seventh Fleet, Rear-Admiral Noble, was assigned Commander Balikpapan Attack Group, as Commander Task Group 78.2. Rear-Admiral R. S. Riggs, U.S.N., was appointed Commander Cruiser Covering Group as Commander Task Group 74.2. The troops for the operation were the 7th Division, I Australian Corps, at Morotai, commanded by Major-General Milford.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile army planning, after considering three possible landing places—Manggar, Sepinggang and Klandasan—had fixed upon Klandasan as the most suitable, despite some obvious disadvantages. These were the shallowness of the water and the strength of the Japanese defences. They were, in the opinion of General Milford and his brigade commanders, offset by a number of factors, including:

- (a) A successful assault against the strongest positions would considerably reduce the duration of the campaign and it was thereby hoped that casualties, which reach their highest in a long drawn out campaign which becomes a war of attrition, would be substantially reduced;
- (b) The greatest fire support is required to overcome the position of greatest strength and this condition would be fulfilled on Fox Day;
- (c) By attacking the centre of the enemy's defences some degree of disorganisation should result which might continue for some days if the attack were pressed with vigour. Japanese reaction is generally slow and it was hoped to capture the vital ground commanding the harbour before he recovered from the initial bombardment;
- (d) The early capture of Balikpapan Bay would ease the problem of supply over the beach and would be a safeguard against unfavourable weather;
- (e) A higher degree of concentration of both fire power and man power could be effected;
- (f) The full power of the force would be quickly deployed as opposed to the narrow front imposed by a coastwise advance;
- (g) Defences between Balikpapan and Manggar were sited to face the east and could more readily be overcome by an advance from the west;
- (h) Fewer engineering tasks of bridging and communications would be met on the vital first day;
- (i) The location of defences suggested that the enemy considered a landing at Klandasan would be too hazardous an undertaking and that tactical surprise (strategic surprise was not possible with the preliminary bombardment and minesweeping) might be achieved.<sup>4</sup>

The army decision was questioned by the United States naval planning team when it arrived at Morotai on 25th May. They preferred a landing

<sup>3</sup> Maj-Gen E. J. Milford, CB, CBE, DSO. CRA 7 Div 1940; MGO AHQ 1941-42; GOC 5 Div 1942-44, 7 Div 1944-45. Regular soldier; b. Warrnambool, Vic, 10 Dec 1894.

<sup>4</sup> 7 Aust Div Report on Operation Oboe Two.

at Sepinggang, or farther east, because of deeper water and weaker Japanese defences. Admiral Noble submitted a paper to General Morshead expressing the naval views, but Morshead, looking ahead to military operations on shore following the landing, ruled in favour of Milford's plan, and finally the naval team agreed to put the division ashore wherever it wished.<sup>5</sup>

The amphibious operation for the capture of Balikpapan was notable for the active and passive defences of the enemy, and the hazard of a thickly sown Allied minefield. It was notable also for the minesweeping work done, for the fine achievement of the Underwater Demolition Teams, and for the weight of the pre-landing bombardments. Before F-day, 23,767 rounds of 4.7-inch to 8-inch were fired; on F-day 11,884 rounds; and through to 7th July a further 11,158 rounds. And some 114,000 rounds of 20-mm and 40-mm were fired from automatic weapons.<sup>6</sup> "For ammunition delivered in support of a one-division landing, this beats all records. The United States Army had been calling for more and more naval gunfire support as the Pacific war progressed; now the 7th Australian Division had cashed in on these accumulated demands—and how those Aussies loved it."<sup>7</sup>

The port of Balikpapan, with its seven piers, could be entered by larger vessels only at high tide because of a sand bar, with a depth of less than four fathoms at low water, blocking the entrance. The three beaches selected for the landing—Red, Yellow and Green—were just to the east of the bay. They provided only mediocre conditions for landing craft. To seaward the beaches along some fifteen miles of coast from Klandasan to Manggar were protected by a log barricade. At the Klandasan beach area this consisted of three lines of heavy wooden posts, set five feet apart, with five feet intervals between verticals. The centre line was offset, and the posts were braced at the top with spiked double diagonal timbers. Apparently so placed to coincide with the surf line, the barricade was only about 10 to 15 yards off shore, and was thus within easy range of shore gunfire and Japanese snipers.

The beaches were well covered by many automatic weapons mounted in log and earth emplacements, and heavier installations were on higher ground farther inland. Only 100 yards or so from the landing beaches ran the coastal highway, and 400 yards farther inland was the pipeline from the oilfields to the refinery at Balikpapan. Captured documents substantiated Intelligence reports that the Japanese intended to flood oil into streams and ditches and ignite it to serve as a barrier. But this plan was never implemented, probably because the pipeline was broken. In

<sup>5</sup> Noble, who had been naval commander at the operation for the liberation of Mindanao, from which he was released on 17th May, flew on that day to Manila for a conference with Barbey and returned in his Flagship *Wasatch* on 20th May. The coastguard cutter *Spencer* with the advance planning team from Davao arrived at Morotai on 25th May and the team commenced active planning with the army. After conferences with Commander Seventh Fleet, Commander Service Force, Seventh Fleet, Commander Motor Torpedo Boats, Seventh Fleet, and the Thirteenth Army Air Force in the Leyte area, Noble and his staff arrived at Morotai in *Wasatch* on 28th May, and immediately commenced detailed planning for the Balikpapan assault.

<sup>6</sup> CTG.78.2 Action Report.

<sup>7</sup> Morison, Vol XIII, p. 276.

addition to the foregoing obstacles to the landing was that of the mine-fields. These, which included magnetic mines, had been laid by the Dutch in 1941, by the Japanese, and by the Allies with mines dropped from aircraft. Their clearance called for sixteen days of sweeping before F-day.

Balikpapan was defended by some 3,500 regular Japanese troops, and there were apparently about 6,500 locally conscripted residents. It was reported that they had been withdrawing men from Balikpapan for some weeks before the assault, with the army personnel moving north to Samarinda and thence overland to Pontianak and Kuching, and the navy going south to Bandjermasin. At the time of the assault there were 5,000 enemy at Samarinda, 60 miles north of Balikpapan, of whom 3,000 were locally conscripted Japanese. No naval interference with the assault was expected, and none materialised. It was expected that the enemy's air attacks would be limited to sporadic raids by small flights of aircraft, and this proved to be so. Four such raids were experienced, with negligible results.

Air support for the operations was supplied by the R.A.A.F., Thirteenth Air Force, Fifth Air Force, Fleet Air Wing Ten under Commander Air Seventh Fleet, and Commander Third Fleet. The R.A.A.F. acted as co-ordinating agency for all pre-invasion strikes and close support. The original air plan was drawn up on the assumption that the R.A.A.F. could support the operation from Tarakan, but facilities there were not available in time. Because of this, Admiral Noble requested carrier support, and three escort carriers were provided by Third Fleet to support the operation during the actual landing and consolidation of the beach-head.

Naval bombardment forces used in the operation were the Cruiser Covering Group (74.2) of five cruisers and seven destroyers, including H.M.A.S. *Arunta*; 74.1, of *Shropshire*, *Hobart* and the two American destroyers *Hart* and *Metcalf*; and 74.3, of two cruisers and four destroyers. The Attack Group (78.2) of 121 ships, including H.M.A. Ships *Manoora* (Flagship of the Transport Unit), *Westralia* and *Kanimbla*, comprised 98 landing craft and miscellaneous vessels, with a screen of 10 destroyers, five destroyer-escorts and one frigate, H.M.A.S. *Gascoyne*. In addition there were a Hydrographic Unit, H.M.A.S. *Warrego* and two small craft; a Minesweeping Group; a Motor Torpedo Unit of 23 P.T's; a Demolition Unit; service, salvage and miscellaneous units; and the Escort Carrier Group (commanded by Rear-Admiral W. D. Sample), U.S. Ships *Suwannee*, *Gilbert Islands* and *Block Island*,<sup>8</sup> with a screen of one destroyer and five destroyer-escorts.

Active preparations for the OBOE Two assault began on 11th June with the start of increased bombing of the objective. This quickly mounted to air strikes of approximately 100 planes a day, carrying 1,000-lb, 500-lb, 250-lb and Napalm bombs. Also on 11th June the Minesweeping Group sailed from Morotai to rendezvous with Cruiser Division 12, U.S. Ships

<sup>8</sup> *Gilbert Islands*, *Block Island*, US aircraft carriers (1944), 11,373 tons, two 5-in guns, 30 aircraft, 19 kts.

*Montpelier* and *Denver* and four destroyers of TG.74.2, and proceed to Balikpapan. Three days after the air "softening" got under way, *Manoora*, *Westralia* and *Kanimbla* arrived at Morotai from Brunei. As an officer of *Westralia* wrote:

After over two years active duty in combined operations, we had become fairly adept at predicting the next move from evidence around us. While resting at Morotai in the middle of June 1945 after the Brunei operation we saw the Liberators returning every day from missions over Borneo's largest oil producing centre. When Tokyo Radio announced that a powerful Allied Fleet was bombarding Balikpapan we knew we were going to invade it, even before officers of the 7th Division came on board on Tuesday, 19th June, and told us.<sup>9</sup>

The Tokyo Radio announcement followed the start of minesweeping operations at Balikpapan on 15th June, when the 16 minesweepers of the minesweeping group, with the covering force, arrived at the objective. Because of the shallow water and the uncleared minefields, *Montpelier* and *Denver* and the destroyers had to remain at ranges where the neutralisation or destruction of the Japanese guns was difficult, and heavy enemy anti-aircraft fire forced Allied bombers and the cruisers' spotting aircraft to remain too high for the desired accuracy. As a result, during the first week of minesweeping, three minesweepers were damaged by enemy gunfire, and many were forced to jettison their sweeps to avoid being hit. By 24th June, however, by which time the Dutch cruiser *Tromp* and the American *Columbia* (also of 74.2) had reached Balikpapan and added their weight of gunfire, the aerial bombing and cruiser fire were making themselves felt; the spotting aircraft had improved their contribution; and enough sweeping had been done to enable destroyers to operate closer inshore. From then on minesweeping was only slightly hampered by gunfire, but mines took toll of the sweepers.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile more Australian ships were arriving at Morotai in preparation for the assault. *Warrego*, fresh from her bombardments in the Wewak area, reached Morotai on the 17th, where Commander Little joined as Commander, Hydrographic Group (CTU.78.2.17) of which the two other vessels were *YMS196*<sup>1</sup> and the American net layer *Mango* (560 tons). On 23rd June *Gascoyne* arrived, having refitted at Williamstown Dockyard, whence she sailed on 1st June. On 24th June TG.74.1, *Shropshire*, *Hobart*, *Arunta* (which had joined from the Cruiser Covering Group) and the two American destroyers, arrived at Tawitawi from Brunei.

At Morotai embarkation of troops proceeded. *Kanimbla* commenced embarking her main body at 5 p.m. on 20th June, and embarked in all 115 officers and 1,152 other ranks, including the 2/9th Battalion, and a total weight of cargo (including vehicles and guns) of 361 tons.

<sup>9</sup> Lieutenant W. N. Swan in account of the Allied landing at Balikpapan—"Our Seventh Invasion".

<sup>10</sup> In all, in the period 15th June to 7th July, three sweepers were sunk and one damaged by mines; three were damaged by gunfire; 15 sets of magnetic gear were lost; the sweepers suffered seven killed and 43 wounded; and 50 mines were swept—34 moored, 16 influence.

<sup>1</sup> *YMS196*, US motor minesweeper (1942-45), 207 tons, one 3-in gun, 13 kts.

*Westralia*'s main body was of the 2/27th Battalion, but Lieutenant Swan<sup>2</sup> recorded:

The 85 officers and 885 men of the 7th Division embarked in *Westralia* belonged to nearly 50 different units. There were men from the Royal Australian Artillery, the Royal Australian Engineers, the 2/6th and 2/11th Australian Field Companies, the 2nd Australian Beach Group, the 2nd A.A.M.C., the 2/2nd Australian Anti-Tank Regiment, the 2/7th Australian Cavalry Commando Regiment, the 2/42nd Australian Cypher Section, the 2/1st Australian Machine Gun Battalion, the 2/1st Australian Guard Regiment, the 2/6th Australian Field Ambulance, the 2/12th Australian General Hospital, the 2/1st Australian A.A. Regiment, the A.A.S.C., and many other units such as cash, postal, and provost sections. In addition were some men of the R.A.A.F. attached to the Command Post 1st Tactical Air Force Reconnaissance Party and the 1st Tactical Air Force Support Section.<sup>3</sup>

On Sunday, 24th June, the Attack Group (78.2) carried out a rehearsal of the landing on a beach near Tanjong Mira, Morotai, and returned to Morotai. At Balikpapan, the underwater demolition teams started work on 25th June, and during their operations from the 25th-28th and on the 30th, they blew a gap of 1,600 yards in the obstacles at Klandasan, and of 800 yards at Manggar. Searches revealed no beach mines. They were continuously under fire, and two of their landing craft were damaged, but in an extremely hazardous operation they suffered no casualties. Swan, in *Westralia*, told of them:

Some U.S. Army engineers from Okinawa were selected to carry out this demolition, and the story of how they did it will go down in the annals of courage. Firstly they swam ashore from little ships and inspected the barrier. Then they gained experience by blowing gaps in the barrier at Manggar. This threw the Japanese off the scent. Several days before we arrived these intrepid men swam ashore in the forenoon and demolished nearly all the barricade along the Klandasan beaches with explosives. No small arms fire greeted them; but the enemy's three-inch coastal guns opened fire at them. By the eve of the landing the posts were no longer standing, and all the troops knew.

## II

On 25th June Vice-Admiral Barbey arrived at Morotai and raised his flag in *Phoenix* as Commander Balikpapan Attack Force, but gave Admiral Noble tactical command of the operation. *Phoenix* left Morotai ahead of the Attack Force and on 29th June joined Admiral Sample's Carrier Group. Rear-Admiral Berkey, in *Nashville*, also joined the C.V.E.'s (escort aircraft carriers). At 1.30 a.m. on 26th June TG.74.1, *Shropshire* wearing the broad pendant of Commodore Farncomb, with *Hobart*, *Hart*, *Metcalf* and *Arunta*, sailed from Tawitawi for Balikpapan, where they arrived on the 27th. Also on the 26th the Attack Force sailed from Morotai. At 9 a.m. the Commander-in-Chief, Australian Military Forces, General Blamey,

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Cdr W. N. Swan, RANR and RAN. HMAS's *Doomba*, *Adelaide*, *Westralia*. Merchant navy officer; of Melbourne; b. Sydney, 18 Dec 1916.

<sup>3</sup> Gavin Long comments in *The Final Campaigns* on "the multitude of specialist units and detachments which existed at this stage of the war". The Order of Battle of the 7th Division and its supporting forces contained the names of 247 headquarters, units or detachments. (See pp. 506-7.)



with General Morshead, General Milford and Admiral Noble, inspected the troops embarked in *Manoora*, *Kanimbla* and *Westralia*. Soon after noon the assault forces began their sortie from Morotai, and at 2 p.m. this was completed and the force formed cruising disposition and proceeded. The passage, which was uneventful, was by the direct route through the Celebes Sea and down through Macassar Strait, at an average speed of 7 to 8 knots. *Warrego* was one of the convoy. The other Australian ship in the operation, *Gascoyne* (Lieutenant Peel) left Morotai at 6.45 a.m. on 27th June escorting Echelon 02-J to Balikpapan. The group comprised a mixed collection of craft towing barges, a P.T. drydock, and a floating crane, and the Australian steamer *James Cook*. Speed was in the vicinity of 3 to 4 knots.

Whilst these slower groups were occupied in what Peel described in his report as this "seemingly interminable passage to Balikpapan", Farncomb's TG.74.1 pushed ahead at 14 knots and anchored at Balikpapan soon after noon on the 27th. That afternoon *Shropshire* and *Hobart* carried out bombardments of targets in the Klandasan area, whilst the destroyers formed an A/S screen. This procedure was followed each day up to F-day, the bombardment forces and their screening destroyers retiring to sea each night. On the 28th and 30th *Hobart* provided fire cover for the underwater demolition teams, and a typical entry in her report was, on the 28th: "0845 UDT's going into beach. 1020 UDT's under fire. Increased rate of fire. 10.45 UDT's withdrawing from beach. 10.58 Reduced rate of fire to one round each two minutes. 11.35 Ammunition in dump seen to blow up as result of our fire."

On Saturday, 30th June, the Attack Force crossed the equator. "Church services were held on board. Everyone made last minute preparations. . . . The ship's crew wore their battle dress and lifebelts, and were all eager to land the Seventh," wrote Swan in *Westralia*. The O.C. Troops, Lieutenant-Colonel Picken,<sup>4</sup> issued the troops with seasick tablets. At 6 p.m. on the 30th light cruiser U.S.S. *Cleveland*<sup>5</sup> (of TG.74.2) with two destroyers escorting, arrived at Balikpapan with the Commander-in-Chief South-West Pacific, General MacArthur, embarked. Early on the Sunday morning, 1st July and F-day, those in the ships of the Attack Force caught their first glimpse of the objective in "a large fire burning on our starboard bow".

*Manoora*'s troops were to land at Green Beach and the orders for that Sunday morning were:

0315 Call the Morning Watch. 0330 Morning Watchmen to breakfast. Call all personnel. 0400 All personnel to breakfast. Morning Watchmen to cruising stations. 0500 Action Stations. 0520 Recover paravanes if streamed. 0630 Synchronise watches—first time. 0635 Operational Action Stations. 0645 Prepare all boats for lowering. Lower all scrambling nets. Synchronise watches—second time. 0700 Anchor. . . . Away all boats.

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Col K. S. Picken, DSO. 2/6 and 2/7 Bns; CO 2/27 Bn 1943-45. Clerk; of East Geelong, Vic; b. Warragul, Vic, 20 Oct 1907.

<sup>5</sup> *Cleveland*, US light cruiser (1942), 10,000 tons, twelve 6-in and twelve 5-in guns, 3 aircraft, 32½ kts.

The scheduled bombardments by cruisers and destroyers of the Cruiser Covering Group, TG.74.1 and TG.74.2, commenced at 7 a.m., and Commander Green, R.A.N. liaison officer with VII Amphibious Force, recorded that "to the immense pall of smoke that already shrouded the foreshore was added the additional haze from innumerable fires and explosions". To the naval bombardment was added the aerial contribution from Liberator aircraft, with Australian and American crews.

Weather conditions for embarking troops and for their passage to shore in landing craft were not the best, there being a fresh breeze and a moderate swell. "A choppy sea," recorded Swan, "caused Lieut-Colonel Picken to feel thankful he had issued his men with seasick tablets the previous day." But the length of experience of the crews of the Australian landing ships and the rehearsal that had been carried out paid dividends, and the troops were landed on time without any unhappy incidents.

*Westralia* anchored "about seven-and-a-half miles south-east of the centre of Balikpapan city and six miles off shore. The sun rose at 7.15 and revealed a battered shore line covered by a heavy pall of smoke from fires caused by our bombs. Oil tanks in the tank farm were alight."

The first two waves of troops on all three beaches rode in on 91 amphibious vehicles (L.V.T's) brought to the landing in L.S.T's. Boats from *Westralia* were in the third, fourth and fifth waves. The first wave from *Manoora* found the swept channel "clearly defined with marker buoys; an excellent piece of work on the part of the survey vessels and minesweepers".<sup>6</sup> On its way in to the landing the wave received "unwelcome and for some minutes undivided attention from a 3-in shore gun, the projectiles from which landed uncomfortably close on both sides of the boats in column; fortunately no casualties resulted".

*Kanimbla* anchored at 7.9 a.m., and all her boat waves arrived on the line of departure, and beached at the correct time. Conditions on the beach—it was approximately high water—were favourable and no boats experienced any difficulty in retracting. All *Kanimbla*'s troops were off the ship at 4 p.m., and all cargo unloaded at 4.23 p.m. Working time to unload guns and vehicles was two hours 41 minutes. "During the period the troops were on board," says the ship's report, "their conduct and behaviour was exemplary."

The first wave of assault troops landed at 8.55 a.m., five minutes early. At 9.3 a.m. the third wave landed, and reported no opposition to troops on beaches other than intermittent gun and mortar fire, which had caused no casualties. The last of the organised waves, the seventeenth, landed at 10.55.

The pre-F-day and pre-landing bombardments had prepared the way for the assault troops most efficiently. Commenting on this, Commander Green, who landed with the first wave from *Manoora*, remarked in his report:

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<sup>6</sup> Report of Wave Leader (Wave 7), first wave from *Manoora*—Lieutenant L. J. H. Cantwell.

An examination of the terrain in the vicinity of all three beaches revealed a scene of desolation that was an admirable tribute to the efficiency of our pre-landing naval bombardment and air force strikes. Dwellings which might at one time have housed snipers were either smouldering ruins or reduced to matchwood and rubble. The rockets had produced the most successful destruction of trees that I have witnessed in the landings in which I have participated. It would be no exaggeration to say that not a single tree or palm remained unscathed, and from the beach to the parallel road there was literally no arboreal cover for a sniper. Two dazed Japs were found in a concrete pill box, but for the initial 500-yard advance inland only eight more Japs were found. The foreshore was exceptionally well provided with concrete machine-gun posts and strong points, some of them so thick that direct hits from six-inch shells had not damaged them in the slightest degree.

By 11 a.m. the attackers had advanced inland about 1,000 yards against very slight opposition and with light casualties. At 11.30 General MacArthur, with Vice-Admiral Barbey, General Morshead and Air Vice-Marshal Bostock, went ashore to inspect positions. At noon troops were reported about two miles inland; and before the day ended, 10,500 assault troops, 700 vehicles and 1,950 tons of stores were landed, over very mediocre beaches, with surf three to four feet high which impeded unloading. As at the previous Borneo landings, excellent work was done by the Naval Beach Commandos, here, as at Tarakan, under the command of Lieut-Commander Morris. Major-General Milford assumed command on shore at 7 p.m., half an hour before the three Australian L.S.I's sailed for Morotai in Convoy O2-T. *Kanimbla's* report states that all boats were hoisted by 7.20 p.m. At 7.24 anchor was aweigh, and at 7.30 *Kanimbla* formed cruising disposition, the ships in company being *Manoora*, *Kanimbla*, *Westralia*, *Titania*, *Carter Hall*, escorted by the American destroyer transports *Alex Diachenko* (1,400 tons), *Liddle* and *Lloyd*.

Throughout the day the Australian ships of the Support Group, in company with their American consorts, supplied scheduled bombardments and call fire as required, and this continued on successive days after F-day, though the strength of the group was progressively reduced. On 2nd July CruDiv12 of TG.74.2, *Montpelier*, *Denver* and four destroyers left Balikpapan for Leyte. Next day Admiral Sample's Escort Carrier Group departed to rejoin Third Fleet, and TG.74.3, *Phoenix*, *Nashville* and destroyers joined the Support Group temporarily, replacing TG.74.1, *Shropshire*, *Hobart*, *Arunta* and the two American destroyers *Albert W. Grant* and *Killen*, which sailed for Tawitawi to replenish with ammunition.

Of the other Australian ships in the assault phase, *Warrego* carried out surveys and placed marker buoys off the landing beaches, and also surveyed the inner harbour. *Gascoyne* pursued her "seemingly interminable" passage with the slow-tow convoy, and finally arrived at Balikpapan in the evening of 5th July. On that day *Shropshire*, with the two American destroyers, left Tawitawi to return to Balikpapan, where they arrived at 8 a.m. on the 7th. Since replenishment ammunition was not available for them, *Hobart* and *Arunta* remained at Tawitawi. On Farncomb's

return to Balikpapan, he assumed the duties of Senior Officer of fire support ships vice Rear-Admiral Berkeley who, with Task Group 74.3—*Nashville*, *Phoenix*, *Bell*, *Conner* and *Burns*—sailed for Subic Bay. The U.S. destroyer *Charrette* reported to Farncomb for fire support duty.

On the 7th there also arrived at Balikpapan from Morotai the three Australian L.S.I's, *Manoora*, *Kanimbla* and *Westralia*, with reinforcements. They disembarked their troops and equipment, and sailed that same afternoon for Morotai, thus completing their final assault operation together as part of VII Amphibious Force. On their arrival at Morotai on Tuesday, 10th July, they were allotted individual missions as troop transports, and at the end of the month the three ships were transferred from the operational command of Commander, VII Amphibious Force, to that of Commander Service Force, Seventh Fleet. It was the end of a combination which had made a notable contribution to the successful conduct of the war in the South-West Pacific Area.

On the 8th and 9th July *Shropshire* carried out bombardments as targets were found by air spotting. Few targets, however, were available for her, and this lack was commented upon unfavourably by Farncomb, who, in his Action Report, said:

The few targets allocated to H.M.A.S. *Shropshire*, the long delays and poor co-ordination experienced indicated that the officers concerned in the Division were not fully indoctrinated in the effective use of heavy Naval gunfire. This was in sharp contrast to the good use made of Naval Gunfire Support by the Ninth Division during the amphibious operations at Tarakan and Brunei Bay.

The extract from the report was forwarded in August 1945 by the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Louis Hamilton,<sup>7</sup> to the Chief of the General Staff. Commenting thereon from Advanced Headquarters, Morotai, in October 1945 the Chief of Staff, Advanced L.H.Q., Lieutenant-General Berryman,<sup>8</sup> remarked:

It appears from the above reports [from Headquarters R.A.A., 7th Australian Division and 1st Australian Naval Bombardment Group] that every provision was made for spotting during the period in question; every effort was made to obtain, for H.M.A.S. *Shropshire*, targets which were suitable for heavy naval gunfire; the only delays seemed to have been caused, not by poor co-ordination, but by the difficulty of the spotters in finding suitable targets. The comments of the Commodore Commanding H.M.A. Squadron and the statements by 1 Aust Naval Bombardment Gp. clearly indicate a difference of opinion as to the best employment of the heavier natures of naval guns in supporting a landing. It appears there were in fact few suitable land targets for engagement by *Shropshire* and the judgment of SFCP [Shore Fire Control Party] is to be commended for not wasting naval ammunition on unsuitable targets.

<sup>7</sup> Admiral Sir Louis Hamilton, KCB, DSO; RN. Home Fleet 1939-43; Vice-Admiral Malta and Flag Officer Central Mediterranean 1943-45; First Naval Member and Chief of Aust Naval Staff 1945-48. B. London, 31 Dec 1890. Died 22 Jun 1957. He assumed duty as First Naval Member and CNS on 29th June 1945 vice Admiral Royle. The appointment carried with it the command of the South-West Pacific Sea Frontier.

<sup>8</sup> Lt-Gen Sir Frank Berryman, KCVO, CB, CBE, DSO, GSO1 6 Div 1940-41; CRA 7 Div 1941; Deputy CGS LHQ 1942-44; comd II and I Corps during 1944; Chief of Staff Adv LHQ 1944-45. Regular soldier; b. Geelong, Vic, 11 Apr 1894.

Nevertheless, *Shropshire's* bombardments on the 8th and 9th were not, apparently, fruitless, and were of help on the 9th in the subjugation of the Frost and Brown features, the sites of the remaining Japanese artillery in the Manggar area. It was the capture of these two features at dusk on the 9th which meant that "the long fight round Manggar was over".<sup>9</sup>

*Shropshire*, which commenced her 8-inch bombardments of the enemy positions at 1 p.m. on the 9th, ceased bombarding at 6 p.m., and just after 7 p.m. weighed and proceeded, in company with U.S. destroyers *Charrette*, *Albert W. Grant* and *Killen*, to Tawitawi, "having completed participation in Balikpapan operations". With this completion *Shropshire*, in common with the other ships of the R.A.N. Squadron, completed her hostile operations in the war.

She arrived at Subic Bay from Tawitawi on 14th July and on the 19th left for Manila, where she arrived the same day. There she joined company with H.M.A.S. *Warramunga*, in which ship Commodore Collins, now recovered from the injuries he had suffered in H.M.A.S. *Australia* at Leyte in October 1944, had taken passage from Sydney. At 8 a.m. on 22nd July, in Manila, the broad pendant of Commodore Collins was hoisted in *Warramunga*. That of Commodore Farncomb was struck in *Shropshire* at sunset that day, and at the same time the broad pendant of Commodore Collins was transferred to the cruiser from *Warramunga*. On 23rd July Commodore Farncomb, his wartime service in command of the squadron completed, left by air for Sydney. That day *Shropshire* and *Warramunga* sailed to join CTF.74 (Rear-Admiral R. F. Good, U.S.N. in *San Francisco*) with the rest of the Task Force, including H.M.A. Ships *Hobart* and *Bataan* (Commander Burrell)—the latest Tribal-class destroyer to be commissioned in the Royal Australian Navy. At 5 p.m. on 26th July TF.74 entered Subic Bay. The R.A.N. Squadron, *Shropshire*, *Hobart*, *Warramunga* and *Bataan*, were still with TF.74 in Subic Bay when Japan surrendered on 15th August. *Arunta*, which had been detached from the Squadron on 11th July to proceed to Australia for refit, was in Sydney.

### III

Meanwhile in Balikpapan the R.A.N. was represented by the smaller ships. *Warrego* remained there, continuing survey work, sounding and buoying. On 12th July Commander Little piloted the Liberty ship *Julien Dubuque* in to the inner harbour, where she was successfully berthed, the first large ship to make the entry. On 16th July, having completed buoyage and sounding, *Warrego* sailed at 6 p.m. for Sydney via Morotai. She reached Sydney on 31st July and, like *Arunta*, was there when Japan surrendered.

*Gascoyne*, on her arrival at Balikpapan on 6th July, joined a patrol being carried out by American destroyers and destroyer-escorts patrolling in a semi-circle around the transport area. Some of *Gascoyne's* officers

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<sup>9</sup> Long, *The Final Campaigns*, pp. 529-30.

were driven around Balikpapan on 13th July, and Commander Peel commented that "the damage to the refineries and houses is indescribable in its completeness. The smell was not pleasant!" He remarked also in his Report of Proceedings:

The system of air raid warnings amongst the soldiery is still a little crude, and consists of a man leaning out of the R.A.A.F. Radar station and yelling to the camp below "Put your b - - - lights out." This is passed along the foreshore. Unfortunately, on one occasion the R.A.A.F. man called out "Is the b - - - tea wet yet?" and all lights were dowsed.

On 21st July H.M.A.S. *Latrobe* (Lieutenant Smith<sup>1</sup>) arrived at Balikpapan, and it was arranged that Australian corvettes should assume responsibility for the naval defence requirements of the port, and arrangements were made with N.O.I.C. Moluccas, Captain Walsh, accordingly. On 22nd July all American destroyers and destroyer-escorts left Balikpapan, and on the 23rd H.M.A.S. *Stawell* (Lieut-Commander Griffith) arrived and took over the duties of senior Australian ship, she and *Latrobe* between them carrying out the duties of guard ship.

It fell to *Gascoyne* to carry out the last of the naval bombardments in the Balikpapan area. On 26th July she proceeded up the Balikpapan River and, in support of a military force designated Buckforce, carried out indirect bombardments of Japanese-held villages, and troop concentration areas. The first series of shoots, under the direction of an Auster spotting aircraft, took place at the village of Pamaluan. The ship fired 168 rounds of 4-inch, all reported in the target area. Due to danger from anti-aircraft fire, Boomerang aircraft were used to spot for the next shoot, on a troop concentration area between the Semoi and Sepaku Rivers. The aircraft had difficulty in seeing the fall of shot, but Major Pelton,<sup>2</sup> the Bombardment Liaison Officer in *Gascoyne*, was satisfied that the area was well covered with the 49 rounds of 4-inch fired.

*Gascoyne*, at the request of the Commanding Officer of the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion, then moved farther up the river with her armed motor boat sounding ahead and landed a military patrol to inspect the village of Mentawir. This successfully carried out, *Gascoyne* bombarded with Bofors fire an area where patrols had reported Japanese and a probable machine-gun post. It was her last action against the Japanese. On Sunday, 29th July, she escorted a convoy to sea and herself proceeded to Morotai. By the end of the month, against enemy resistance described as "desperate", the 7th Division had established a perimeter including the Sambodja oilfields, 28 miles from Balikpapan.

As is remarked in *The Final Campaigns*, "the Balikpapan operation—the largest amphibious attack carried out by Australian troops—succeeded fairly swiftly". But "the Japanese, who were in well-prepared positions

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<sup>1</sup> Lt-Cdr W. A. Smith, RANVR. Served RN 1940-44; comd HMAS *Latrobe* 1944-46. Of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 2 Mar 1911.

<sup>2</sup> Maj G. B. Pelton. 2/4 Fd Regt; 1 Aust Naval Bombardment Group. Insurance clerk; of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 29 Dec 1913.

and well-equipped with guns and mortars, resisted with their usual fortitude and paid more than seven lives for each Australian life they took. Once again they demonstrated how a force of resolute men well dug in could delay a stronger force far more formidably armed.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Long, pp. 546-7.

## CHAPTER 27

### FINAL MILESTONES TO JAPAN'S SURRENDER

WHILE the operations for the capture of Balikpapan were in progress during July, other events, which marked the final milestones on the Allies' long journey to Japan, were taking place or were in train. The war had reached the enemy's homeland, which for six months had felt the increasing weight of Allied air attacks and had its first experience of naval surface bombardments when, on 14th July, the American Third Fleet bombarded the steel works on Hokkaido, northernmost of the four main islands. The few remaining remnants of the navy, upon whose ability to exercise sea power depended not only Japan's hopes of winning the war but her national inviolability, were this month destroyed in the air strikes on her ports. The road to invasion lay open. But this month, also, an Allied decision was reached which could obviate the necessity to take that road.

Among the events in train were those designed to defeat the large Japanese forces in South-East Asia and elsewhere outside the Home Islands. In the South-West Pacific the Australian forces were actively engaged against the enemy in Bougainville, New Britain, New Guinea and Borneo. Farther west, those of Mountbatten's South-East Asia Command, pushing forward to complete victory in Burma, were engaged in the preliminaries for the assault on the invaders of Malaya and Singapore. In February Mountbatten had outlined his plans to the Chiefs of Staff: to secure the Phuket Island area (at the southern end of the Kra Isthmus) early in June 1945; to secure the Port Swettenham-Port Dickson area in October 1945; to capture Singapore between December 1945 and March 1946, and thereafter to complete the clearance of South-East Asia.

In January the campaign in northern Burma for the Burma Road was brought to a successful conclusion, and the land route to China was opened. By the end of February the northern forces were able to advance southwards on the eastern flank. On the west the British entered Taungup in April. On the central front the Fourteenth Army, despite delays occasioned by the separation of "the resources of the China and Burma-India theatres", and a shortage of transport aircraft, continued to advance. It entered Mandalay on 9th March; severed the Japanese communications between that city and Meiktila, 80 miles farther south, by the end of the month; and by the beginning of April "Fourteenth Army had its teeth into a disorganised enemy, and 'the battle of the Irrawaddy', to give it its Japanese title, was over".<sup>1</sup> Throughout the month Fourteenth Army continued its southern drive, and on 6th May made contact at Pegu, 50 miles N.N.E. of Rangoon, with the advanced troops of a British brigade which, seaborne

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<sup>1</sup> J. Erhman, *Grand Strategy*, Vol VI, pp. 194-8.



from Akyab (operation DRACULA) had entered Rangoon on the 3rd, coincidental with the arrival of the monsoon. Apart from the necessary clearing operations, the reconquest of central Burma had been achieved.

It was now possible for Mountbatten to modify his February plans, and on 4th May he reported to the Chiefs of Staff that the deteriorating position of the Japanese land forces, and the eclipse of their air and sea power, should enable him to dispense with the attack on Phuket Island, and bring the Port Swettenham-Port Dickson attack (operation ZIPPER) forward from October to the second half of August. This, in turn, should enable him to attack Singapore by the end of 1945. He planned to land two British infantry divisions with one brigade in Malaya, following up with a further three divisions and one brigade, and reserving two more divisions for subsequent operations. The forces for the attack were concentrated in India and around Rangoon, and it was proposed that they would be carried to the assault area in 72 landing ships. On 2nd July the Chiefs of Staff informed Mountbatten that he should launch ZIPPER as planned. Meanwhile the Eastern Fleet carried out preliminary operations in the approaches to ports which it was expected would soon be re-occupied. Early in July minesweepers cleared the eastern side of the Nicobar Islands, while surface forces covered them and bombarded shore targets. On 19th July a minesweeping and bombardment force left Ceylon to clear the approaches to Phuket Island, while aircraft from the escort carriers *Ameer* and *Empress*<sup>2</sup> attacked enemy airfields and other targets on shore.<sup>3</sup>

There were other preliminary operations, in one of which an Australian officer took part. In the first week of July some British XE-craft, midget submarines, were allocated to the Commander of the American Seventh Fleet, Admiral Kinkaid, for operations. He directed that they were to be employed to cut the cable from Singapore to Hong Kong, and to attack Japanese heavy cruisers in Johore Strait. On 27th July the British submarines *Spark*, *Stygian* and *Spearhead* left Brunei and the *Selene*<sup>4</sup> left Subic Bay, each with a midget submarine in tow. On 31st July *Spearhead* towed to the required position the midget *XE4*, Lieutenant Shean,<sup>5</sup> who succeeded in cutting the Hong Kong to Saigon cable and the Singapore to Saigon cable. The Captain (S/M) 14th Flotilla, reported that the operation was perfectly executed according to plan. The divers did an excellent job in over 40 feet of water, which was much deeper than expected, although hampered by tide and rough weather, and brought back one foot of each cable as evidence of their success.

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<sup>2</sup> HMS *Empress*, escort carrier (1942), 11,420 tons, two 5-in guns, 20 aircraft, 16 kts.

<sup>3</sup> Roskill, *The War at Sea*, Vol III, Part II, pp. 366-7.

<sup>4</sup> HMS's *Spark*, *Stygian*, *Spearhead*, *Selene*, submarines (1944), 715 tons, one 3-in gun, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 14 kts.

<sup>5</sup> Lt-Cdr M. H. Shean, DSO; RANVR. HMS *Bluebell*; 12th and 14th Submarine Flotillas. Student; of Perth, WA; b. Perth, 6 Jul 1918.

Shean was awarded a Bar to the DSO which marked his participation in a midget submarine attack at Bergen on 14th April 1944.

## II

A growing body of opinion in America held that Japan could be defeated by sea and air power without the necessity for invasion.<sup>6</sup> Apart from the direct naval and air attacks on her homeland, its nourishment was being reduced drastically by the diminution through air and naval attack of her merchant marine.

At the outbreak of war in December 1941, Japanese merchant tonnage totalled 6,100,000 tons. During the war Japan built 3,293,814 tons, and added a further 822,963 tons of captured and salvaged tonnage. But by the end of March 1945 this grand total of 10,216,777 tons had been by Allied action reduced to 1,800,000 tons, "all but 150,000 tons of which was in the Inner Zone".<sup>7</sup>

The three main instruments of Allied attack were the submarine's torpedo, the aerial bomb, and the mine. Together they accounted for the destruction of 7,968,660 tons of the 8,349,234 of Japanese merchant shipping sunk during the war through Allied action. A further 269,000 tons was lost in the heavy total of 97 ships which were marine casualties, bringing Japanese merchant ship losses in the war to an aggregate figure of 8,618,234 tons.

The sharpest of the three Allied instruments was the submarine's torpedo, which cut deeply into the Japanese merchant fleet and sank 1,153 ships totalling 4,889,000 tons, about 57 per cent of all losses. Australia figured in this in that Fremantle was a base for Allied submarines engaged in this warfare. The Americans sank by far the largest share of the total, but British and Dutch boats contributed quotas of 29 ships of 65,000 tons and 10 ships of 42,000 tons respectively. In the air attacks the Americans again achieved the greatest destruction of Japanese merchant vessels, though the British, Australian and New Zealand air forces also contributed. Final statistics showed that Allied aircraft sank 748 ships of 2,488,000 tons. Of these the Americans accounted for 724 ships of 2,412,300 tons.

In March 1945 operation STARVATION was put into effect. It aimed to sever Japan's "Inner Zone" communications with Manchuria, Korea and North China, and to close Japanese harbours. It was an intensive campaign of air minelaying, mainly carried out by B29 long-range bombers of the U.S. Army Air Force operating from the Marianas. Operation STARVATION marked the culmination of the progressively increasing campaign of aerial minelaying by the Allies which began in June 1944, and was contributed to by many air commands, including American bombers based on China, General MacArthur's South-West Pacific Air Force in the Philippines, the Royal Air Force from India and Ceylon, and the Royal Australian Air Force from New Guinea and Darwin. Operation STARVATION was well named. As the British naval historian has said:

<sup>6</sup> Twelve months previously, in July 1944, President Roosevelt had advanced this view, and both MacArthur and Nimitz had agreed with him. (See Fleet Admiral W. D. Leahy, *I Was There* (1950), p. 296.)

<sup>7</sup> Roskill, Vol III, Part II, p. 371.

By the beginning of July Allied aircraft were ranging almost continuously over the Japanese mainland and its sea approaches, and the blockade was virtually complete. No matter what other offensive measures were taken the surrender of Japan could not have been long deferred; for her people were on the verge of starvation, her economic plight was desperate, and her industries were in chaos. The blockade had, in fact, been far more successful than we realised at the time. Though the submarines had been the first and main instrument for its enforcement, it was the air-laid mines which finally strangled Japan.<sup>8</sup>

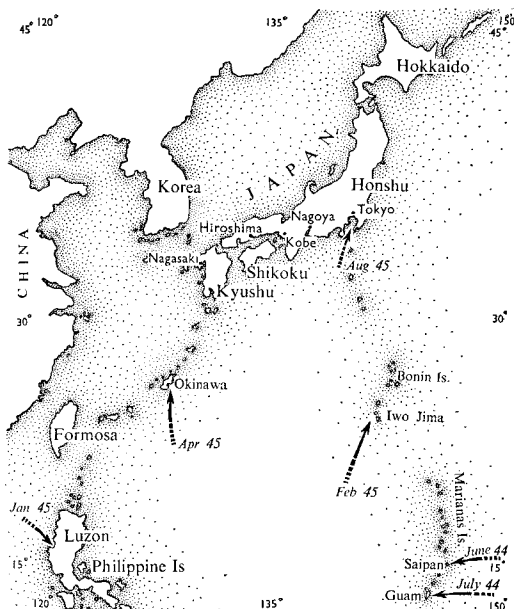
However, despite the growing opinion that sea and air power could achieve the defeat of Japan without invasion, the planning of an assault was pressed ahead. On 5th

June the main body of the British Pacific Fleet arrived in Sydney after its participation in operation ICEBERG. On the 28th of the month it left its Australian base to return to the operation area.

It was accompanied by the two Australian destroyers *Quiberon* and *Quickmatch* which, in company with H.M. Ships *Quality* and *Quadrant*, left Sydney on 26th June, and on the 30th made rendezvous with the aircraft carriers *Formidable*, *Victorious* and *Implacable*<sup>9</sup> off Brisbane, and were on the carriers' screen to Manus, where they arrived on 4th July. Four other Australian destroyers, *Napier*, *Norman*, *Nepal* and *Nizam*

of the 7th Flotilla, left Sydney on 28th June and sailed independently for Manus, where they, too, arrived, via Milne Bay, on 4th July. For the forthcoming operations against the Japanese mainland the 7th Flotilla was assigned to the command of CTF.112, Rear-Admiral Fleet Train.

While the British Pacific Fleet had replenished in Sydney, the American Third Fleet's Fast Carrier Task Force had similarly been nourished at Leyte. It was back on station off Japan on 10th July, with Admiral Halsey flying his flag in the battleship *Missouri*,<sup>1</sup> and Vice-Admiral McCain flying his in the carrier *Shangri-la*.<sup>2</sup> McCain's command comprised 16 carriers,



Stepping stones to Japan, 1944-45

<sup>8</sup> Roskill, Vol III, Part II, p. 371.

<sup>9</sup> HMS *Implacable*, aircraft carrier (1944), 23,000 tons, sixteen 4.5-in guns, over 60 aircraft, 32 kts.

<sup>1</sup> *Missouri*, US battleship (1944), 45,000 tons, nine 16-in and twenty 5-in guns, 33 kts.

<sup>2</sup> *Shangri-la*, US aircraft carrier (1944), 27,100 tons, twelve 5-in guns, 103 aircraft, 33 kts.

8 battleships, 19 cruisers and over 60 destroyers, organised into task groups.

Third Fleet resumed action on 10th July with a series of heavy air attacks on targets in the Tokyo Plain. After refuelling, McCain moved to the northernmost of the main islands, Hokkaido, and on 14th July the carrier aircraft attacked the ships of the important train ferries carrying coal from Hokkaido to Honshu, and sank two of the twelve vessels employed on the service. Also on the 14th battleships, cruisers and destroyers of Third Fleet moved close in shore and bombarded the steel works of the Japan Iron Company at Kamaishi, Hokkaido. The bombardment ships encountered no opposition of any kind, and on the conclusion of the operation Halsey withdrew to refuel and replenish from his fleet train.

During this replenishment period, on 16th July, the British Pacific Fleet joined up with the Third Fleet. Lieut-Commander Knox, in *Quiberon*, recorded the incident. The British Pacific Fleet, TF.37, left Seeadler Harbour, Manus, on 6th July, and from then until the 12th was on passage to the operational fuelling area. On the 7th *Quiberon* fuelled from H.M.N.Z.S. *Achilles* and embarked 96 tons of oil in 63 minutes, and "the ship celebrated her third birthday quietly". From the 13th to the 16th the Fleet was in the refuelling area, and *Quiberon* "between 0520 and 0920"—on the 13th—"acted as D.S.B. Destroyer for part of the task force during which time mail and correspondence were transferred to, and collected from, eleven ships. . . . At 0500/16th gained contact with Task Force 38."

Contact thus established, Admiral Rawlings, commanding TF.27, met Admiral Halsey and conferred with him regarding the tasks to be allotted to TF.37, tactical control of which was reserved to Rawlings.

Halsey offered three alternatives. The first was that the British Pacific Fleet should form the fourth Task Group in McCain's force, conforming to the general movements of the latter, but not receiving direct orders from its commander; the second was that Rawlings' ships should work semi-independently and at a distance of sixty to seventy miles from McCain's; while the third proposal gave the British Pacific Fleet complete independence, in which case certain targets in Japan would be allocated to it. Admiral Rawlings unhesitatingly accepted the first alternative, and throughout the succeeding weeks the British Pacific Fleet worked as an additional group in the Fast Carrier Task Force—an arrangement which proved entirely satisfactory to the British and American commanders.<sup>3</sup>

Commander Walton,<sup>4</sup> in *Quickmatch*, briefly listed the air strikes flown off from carriers of the Third Fleet and the British Pacific Fleet:

17th July against Tokyo and the Tokyo Plains area.

18th July against the same target area.

24th July against Kure, Miho, and Kobe areas.

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<sup>3</sup> Roskill, Vol III, Part II, p. 373.

<sup>4</sup> Walton assumed command of *Quickmatch* on 20th July.

25th July against Kure, Kobe, Maizuru and Nagoya areas.

28th July against Kure and Kobe areas.

30th July against Tokyo and Nagoya areas.

"During all these strikes," Walton recorded, "few Japanese aircraft attempted sorties against the fleet and none penetrated to the fleet itself. The ship, consequently, has seen no action during the month."

This final comment applied equally to the four Australian ships of the 7th Flotilla. With the Fleet Train they spent their time escorting and carrying out D.S.B. duties. Plunkett-Cole, in *Norman*, closed his Report of Proceedings for July with:

The health and conduct of the Ship's Company has been satisfactory throughout the month of July. Considerable disappointment is evident at the role of maid-of-all-work to which the ship has been condemned for the present strike period, but the hard work entailed has at all times been carried out with alacrity and efficiency.

Stephenson, in *Nepal*, remarked that "During the period in the fuelling area from 12th to 27th July I proceeded alongside 78 ships to deliver mails, correspondence and stores, etc." Another Australian ship that was with the Logistic Support Group was the corvette *Gawler*, whose commanding officer, Lieut-Commander Dixon, commented in his Letter of Proceedings that on 21st July *Gawler* was 345 miles from Honshu and 410 from Tokyo. And he added: "Is this the closest an A.M.S. has yet been?"

There was, however, one Australian ship which in these final naval attacks on the Japanese islands took an active part, and that in one of the surface bombardments, the first in which British and American ships jointly participated. *Quiberon* had her share of "maid-of-all-work" duties, as on 13th July. But on the 17th Knox recorded:

At 1500/17th detached in company with H.M.S. *Quality* to screen H.M.S. *King George V* for night bombardment. At 1800/17th contact was made with U.S. bombardment force of six battleships and destroyer screen. Course was shaped for the Japanese coast. At 2310/17th the battleships opened fire on the Hitachi area [of Honshu] at a range of about 26,000 yards. The bombardment continued for about 30 minutes, at the end of which time the entire force withdrew to the east at high speed. No opposition was encountered and owing to the poor visibility no results observed apart from a red glow in the target area as the force withdrew. At 0730/18th, rejoined TF.37.

During the bombardment period the combined American-British force fired 1,500 tons of shells on industrial centres along a 60-mile stretch of coast north of Tokyo. The *King George V* fired 267 rounds from her 14-inch guns. Besides the battleship, the British force included the aircraft carrier *Formidable*, cruisers *Newfoundland* and *Black Prince*, and destroyers *Barfleur*,<sup>5</sup> *Grenville*, *Troubridge*, *Undine*,<sup>6</sup> and H.M.A.S. *Quiberon*.

<sup>5</sup> HMS *Barfleur*, destroyer (1944), 2,315 tons, four 4.5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>6</sup> HMS's *Grenville*, *Troubridge*, *Undine*, destroyers (1943-44), 1,710 tons (*Troubridge*, 1,730), four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

With some intermission due to bad weather and fuelling requirements, the American and British fleets continued throughout the remainder of July to strike heavily with bombing raids on targets on Honshu and in the Inland Sea. On the 24th, 25th and 28th of the month the Americans struck the naval base at Kure, and in these attacks completed the destruction of the Japanese Navy. The British Pacific Fleet was not allowed to take part in thus writing "finis" to Japan's instrument of sea power, since Halsey accepted the view of his Chief of Staff that such a denial should be made to "forestall a possible post-war claim by Britain that she had delivered even a part of the final blow that demolished the Japanese Fleet".<sup>7</sup> During the three days of onslaught—the last two of which were separated by a fuelling period—the American carrier-borne aircraft sank in Kure the aircraft carrier *Amagi*; the battleship-carriers *Ise* and *Hyuga*; the battleship *Haruna*; five cruisers including the heavy cruisers *Aoba* and *Tone* and the light cruiser *Oyodo*; and several smaller warships. As the British naval historian remarked: "Pearl Harbour was finally avenged—which was probably the purpose uppermost in Halsey's mind at the time."<sup>8</sup>

### III

In the middle of June President Truman called a series of meetings, extending over four days, at the White House to discuss plans for the future prosecution of the war. On 29th June the President approved the American Army's plan for invading Kyushu on 1st November, and on 30th June the strategic decisions reached were communicated to the British. They included the invasion of Kyushu on 1st November; the continuation of operations for securing and maintaining necessary sea communications; the defeat of the remaining Japanese in the Philippines; the seizure of Balikpapan; the continuation of strategic air operations to support the accomplishments of the over-all objective. The British were told that:

Planning and preparation for the campaign in Japan subsequent to the invasion of Kyushu is continuing on the basis of meeting a target date of 1st March 1946 for the invasion of the Tokyo Plain. This planning is premised on the belief that defeat of the enemy's armed forces in the Japanese homeland is a prerequisite to unconditional surrender, and that such a defeat will establish the optimum prospect of capitulation by Japanese forces outside the main Japanese Islands. We recognise the possibility also that our success in the main Islands may not obviate the necessity of defeating Japanese forces elsewhere; decision as to steps to be taken in this eventuality must await further developments.<sup>9</sup>

Unofficial information indicated that the design for the invasion of Kyushu (operation OLYMPIC) and Honshu (operation CORONET) was on the largest scale. Some five million men would take part in the operations,

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<sup>7</sup> W. F. Halsey and J. Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story* (1947), p. 265.

<sup>8</sup> Roskill, Vol III, Part II, p. 375.

<sup>9</sup> Ehrman, Vol VI, p. 260.

and the troops would be covered and supported by a fleet and air force larger than had been used in OVERLORD. Almost all the forces would be American, and they would absorb almost all of the Americans' available strength. The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered that at this stage their allies could best help by complementary action elsewhere, the British in the South-West Pacific and the Russians, when they entered the war, on the mainland of Asia.

Until the end of June 1945, the British contribution to the main attack on Japan was confined officially to the British Pacific Fleet and to the prospect of a force of long-range bombers based on Okinawa. But now plans were being drawn up in London for a more ambitious British contribution to operations in the Central Pacific, which in turn defined action in South-East Asia and the South-West Pacific from the end of 1945. The British Chiefs of Staff considered that if the Japanese Home Islands were to be invaded, it was important for political reasons that the British should play a part in the operation, and that their land forces must participate, on whatever scale, in the invasion itself. Naval and air support of the invasion, accompanied by "mopping up" operations far away, were not considered enough.

As a result of this, on 4th July 1945 Mr Churchill sent a telegram to Mr Curtin saying that, while hitherto it had not been planned to provide British land forces for the invasion of Japan, the early capture of Rangoon and the prospect of opening the Malacca Straits before the end of the year, made it possible to reconsider the whole problem.

A preliminary examination has shown that it might now be possible to provide a British Commonwealth force of some three to five divisions carried in British shipping, supported by British naval forces and a small tactical air component. The whole force would be placed under United States command. I am well aware that the Australian Government wish to take part in the main operations against Japan and therefore it would be most welcome if the Australian Division, which I understand will be available, would join this force, the R.A.N. form part of the naval forces involved, and the R.A.A.F. squadrons form part of the air component. I am sending a similar proposal to the Prime Minister of New Zealand. I am sure you will agree with me that a joint Commonwealth force of British, Australian, New Zealand, British Indian and possibly Canadian divisions would form a striking demonstration of Commonwealth solidarity, and that it is important that we should share with the Americans the burden of the assault on Japan.

Mr Churchill went on to say that in presenting this proposal to the Americans the British would also discuss the question of command in the South Pacific Area. Tentative proposals would take the form

that the U.S. should hand over the responsibility for the S.W.P.A., less the Philippines, as soon as practicable, probably after the recapture of Singapore, and that the Australian Chiefs of Staff, linked with the Combined Chiefs of Staff through the British Chiefs of Staff, should take over that part of the area east of Celebes, while the remainder should come under SACSEA. Details of the boundaries must, of course, await broad agreement.

In a reply on 20th July, which was endorsed by a meeting of the Advisory War Council on 19th July,<sup>1</sup> Mr Curtin said that it was desired

that an Australian Force, comprising the R.A.N. Squadron, a division of the A.M.F., and a R.A.A.F. component, as indicated in our proposals already before the Chiefs of Staff should participate in the main invasion operations against Japan. Public opinion was disappointed that the Australian forces allotted for the Philippines campaign were not used, with the result that our military effort during the latter part of 1944 and the early part of 1945 was judged solely on the important, but none the less secondary roles allotted to the remainder of our forces.

Mr Curtin emphasised that the tasks being carried out by the Australian forces, under General MacArthur's directive, in New Guinea, New Britain and the Solomon Islands—plus the serious limitations of Australian manpower capacity<sup>2</sup>—meant that it would be impossible for Australia to accept any further military commitments

from her own resources, apart from her contribution to the proposed Commonwealth Force for the invasion of Japan, or her individual representation at the invasion.

Regarding the question of command in the South-West Pacific Area, Mr Curtin told the British Prime Minister that the Australian Government considered that the area east of Celebes and west of the Australian Mandated Territory should not be separated from the remainder of the East Indies now forming part of the South-West Pacific Area. If it were desired to set up a British Commonwealth Command whose Eastern Area would embrace the region east of Celebes and west of the Australian Mandated Territory, Australia would be glad to facilitate the assembly, training and staging of any troops that could be made available, provided that they were located in certain island areas now in use, and not on the Australian mainland. If it were decided to set up such a British Commonwealth Command, Australia's contribution in the region of the existing S.W.P.A. would be the reconquest of New Guinea, the Solomons and New Britain

<sup>1</sup> At the Advisory War Council meeting Mr W. M. Hughes, Mr Spender, and Mr Fadden emphasised that Australia must participate in any invasion of Japan. Mr Hughes stated that "it was of vital importance for the maintenance of the prestige of Britain in the Pacific that she should play a full part in the conquest of Japan", and that while it was preferable for Australia to be associated with the proposed British Commonwealth Force, if that could not be organised in time to take part in the main offensive, "then Australia herself should not fail to participate in these operations". With his usual prescience, Mr Hughes also remarked that "in view of the increasing scale and weight of United States sea and air attacks against Japan, the situation was fluid and a decision might be reached much sooner than had originally been anticipated".

<sup>2</sup> This was a matter of considerable concern to Australia, as it was to Britain, with the demands for post-war reconstruction now making themselves heard. In Britain, the need for some amelioration of the condition of the populace was put by the Government: "The British civilian has had five years of blackout and four years of intermittent blitz. The privacy of his home has been periodically invaded by soldiers or evacuees or war workers requiring billets. In five years of drastic labour mobilisation, nearly every man and every woman under 50 without young children has been subject to direction to work, often far from home. The hours of work average 53 a week for men and 50 overall; when work is done, every citizen who is not excused for reasons of family circumstances, work, etc., has had to do 40-8 hours a month duty in the Home Guard or Civil Defence. Supplies of all kinds have been progressively limited by shipping and manpower shortage; the queue is part of normal life. Taxation is probably the severest in the world, and is coupled with continuous pressure to save. The scarce supplies, both of goods and services, must be shared with hundreds of thousands of United States, Dominion, and Allied troops; in the preparation of Britain first as the base and then as the bridgehead, the civilian has inevitably suffered hardships spread over almost every aspect of his daily life." (Quoted in Ehrman, Vol VI, pp. 239-40.)

Some lifting of the living standard was essential if Britain were to restore her capital equipment and recover her export trade. To a somewhat lesser degree this applied also to Australia. The circumstances reduced the military service manpower in both countries.



less Rabaul. In regard to any set-up to which it was a party, the Australian Government reserved the right to determine the nature and extent of the Australian war effort, and the allocation of manpower and material resources for such purposes.

On 17th July the Combined Chiefs of Staff "agreed in principle to the participation of a British Commonwealth land force in the final phase of the war against Japan, subject to the satisfactory resolution of operational problems and to the clarification of certain factors which the United States Chiefs of Staff believe will be controlling". The "satisfactory resolution of operational problems" soon presented difficulties. On 18th July, the day after the "agreement in principle" by the Combined Chiefs of Staff, General MacArthur's comments on the British proposal were circulated. He commented on the difficulties in allocating a separate national sector to the Commonwealth, and on the dangers of introducing a new force, unaccustomed to the practice of the rest, into a complex operation. He preferred to limit the Commonwealth troops definitely

to three divisions—one British, one Canadian, one Australian—who should be concentrated by 1st December 1945, in Borneo or the United States and moved to the operational area by 10th March, should be trained in American methods, lifted by British shipping but equipped and supplied by the Americans, and should function, as a Corps within a U.S. Army, as part of the Assault Reserve.<sup>3</sup>

By 31st July the British Chiefs of Staff gave their opinion on MacArthur's comments and proposals, and stated "that the views of the Supreme Commander concerned should be accepted wherever possible"—and they themselves accepted them. The British Chiefs of Staff and the Service departments embarked on detailed arrangements. But on 10th August the Joint Chiefs of Staff were questioning very seriously "the feasibility of utilising any British forces requiring both United States equipment and amphibious training in an assault role". Five days later Japan capitulated, so that the question of her invasion lapsed. But for that, there is little doubt that "much debate must have lain ahead before British troops could have waded ashore on to the beaches of Honshu".<sup>4</sup>

As to Mountbatten and the boundaries of his command, on 2nd August the Combined Chiefs of Staff sent him a directive:

Your primary task is the opening of the Straits of Malacca at the earliest possible moment. It is also intended that British Commonwealth land forces should take part in the main operations against Japan, which have been agreed as the supreme operations in the war; and that operations should continue in the Outer Zone to the extent that forces and resources permit.<sup>5</sup>

The directive informed Mountbatten that the Eastern Boundary of his command would be extended to include Borneo, Java and the Celebes, and that it was desirable that he assume command of the additional areas as soon as convenient after 15th August 1945. From the date of his

<sup>3</sup> Ehrman, Vol VI, p. 269.

<sup>4</sup> Ehrman, p. 271.

<sup>5</sup> Ehrman, p. 253.

taking over the extended areas such Dominion and Dutch forces as were operating therein would come under his command, though they would continue to be based on Australia. The area to the east of the new boundary would be an Australian command under the British Chiefs of Staff.

Mountbatten was also told of the proposed British participation in the invasion of Japan, and that he would be required to provide a proportion of the force. "Units of the East Indies fleet may also take part." Subject to these higher priority commitments, Mountbatten was directed to complete the liberation of Malaya; maintain pressure on the Japanese across the Burma-Siam frontier; capture the key areas of Siam; establish bridge-heads in Java and/or Sumatra to enable the subsequent clearance of these areas to be undertaken in due course. "You will develop Singapore and such other bases as you may require to the extent necessary for operations against the Japanese."

Meanwhile hints of Japanese peace-seeking were heard. On 17th July the last Allied wartime conference (the TERMINAL Conference) opened in Potsdam, just outside Berlin. The Allied attendance was on much the same scale as at Yalta, but the composition of the American and British delegations was changed. President Truman now headed the Americans. Churchill led the British party but with altered status. In May the Conservative Party and Labour Party of Britain decided to go to the country in July. In consequence, Churchill attended the TERMINAL Conference not as leader of a coalition, but as Prime Minister in a caretaker government. He was accompanied by the leader of the Labour Party, Clement Attlee, to preserve some continuity should the caretaker government be defeated at the polls. On the 17th, in a private talk between Churchill and Stalin, the Russian leader told the Prime Minister of a Japanese approach to the Russian Government, when it was intimated that the Emperor "fervently desires that the war be terminated swiftly", but that "so long as the United States and Britain adhere to an unconditional surrender in the Greater East Asia War, for the honour and survival of the country the Emperor has no alternative but to continue an all-out war". The Americans were already aware of this. The approach to Russia resulted from instructions from the Japanese Foreign Minister, Togo (who was in favour of peace) to the Japanese Ambassador in Moscow, Sato. The message from Togo was intercepted, and the Americans thus knew of these "peace-feelers" developments on 13th July.<sup>6</sup>

There was further interchange between the Japanese and Russians during the next few days, which reinforced the impression given by the first approach, that the Japanese would not accept unconditional surrender. After considerable discussion between the Western Allies on this subject there was broadcast on the night of 26th July 1945 the Potsdam Declaration, which departed from the bare formula of unconditional surrender, and developed in some detail how Japan would be treated after surrender.

<sup>6</sup> "The first real evidence of a Japanese desire to get out of the war came today through intercepted messages from Togo, Foreign Minister, to Sato, Japanese Ambassador in Moscow." *The Forrestal Diaries* (1951), p. 74.

The declaration touched on the necessity to eliminate "the authority and influence of those who have deceived and misled the people of Japan into embarking on world conquest". It told of what must be done in Japan to revive and strengthen democracy among the Japanese people. It outlined Japan's economic future, and what industries she would be permitted to maintain. It stated that the occupying forces of the Allies would be withdrawn from Japan when the objectives had been accomplished and there had been established, in accordance with the freely expressed will of the Japanese people, a peacefully inclined and responsible Government. It concluded with its only reference to unconditional surrender:

We call upon the Government of Japan to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all the Japanese armed forces, and to provide proper and adequate assurances of their good faith in such action. The alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction.

In Japan the Potsdam Declaration received a mixed reception. The qualified "unconditional surrender" encouraged the peace party which, with the American landing on Okinawa in April, began to emerge in the small inner circle which held power in Japan. Popular opinion there seemed to be that the terms were less harsh than they might have been; and the Emperor was reported to have accepted the Declaration without hesitation. But the Army refused to contemplate surrender in any circumstances.

On 28th July the Japanese Prime Minister, Admiral Suzuki, informed the Press that the Government intended entirely to ignore the Potsdam Declaration. On 2nd August Togo instructed Sato to approach the Russians again, and his telegram said that in regard to terms of termination of the war, "it is our intention to make the Potsdam Three-Power Declaration the basis of the study regarding these terms". But on that day the TERMINAL Conference ended, and the various delegates left Potsdam. Stalin and Molotov did not return to Moscow until 6th August. And when Sato gained his interview with Molotov at 5 p.m. on the 8th, it was only to hear from the Soviet Foreign Minister that Russia would declare war on Japan next day.

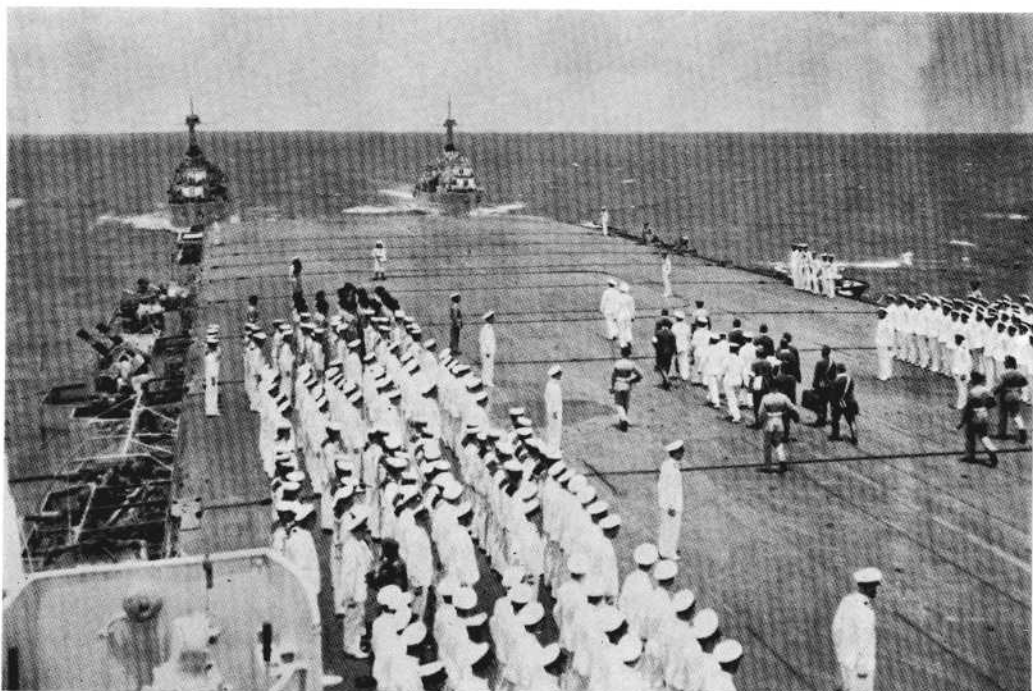
#### IV

On 16th July, the day before the opening of the TERMINAL Conference at Potsdam, there was born at Alamogordo, in the desert of New Mexico, the means of bringing the war to a sudden end. It was the culmination of years of research which followed the introduction in 1911 by the New Zealand born scientist, Ernest Rutherford, of the nucleus theory of the constitution of the atom. Eight years later Rutherford discovered that it was possible to effect nuclear transmutation, and as a result of the work done on this, there was found in 1939 the means of releasing nuclear energy by atomic fission. The potentialities here for producing a weapon of devastating explosive power were such that the British Government organised scientific research on a large scale. There was a full



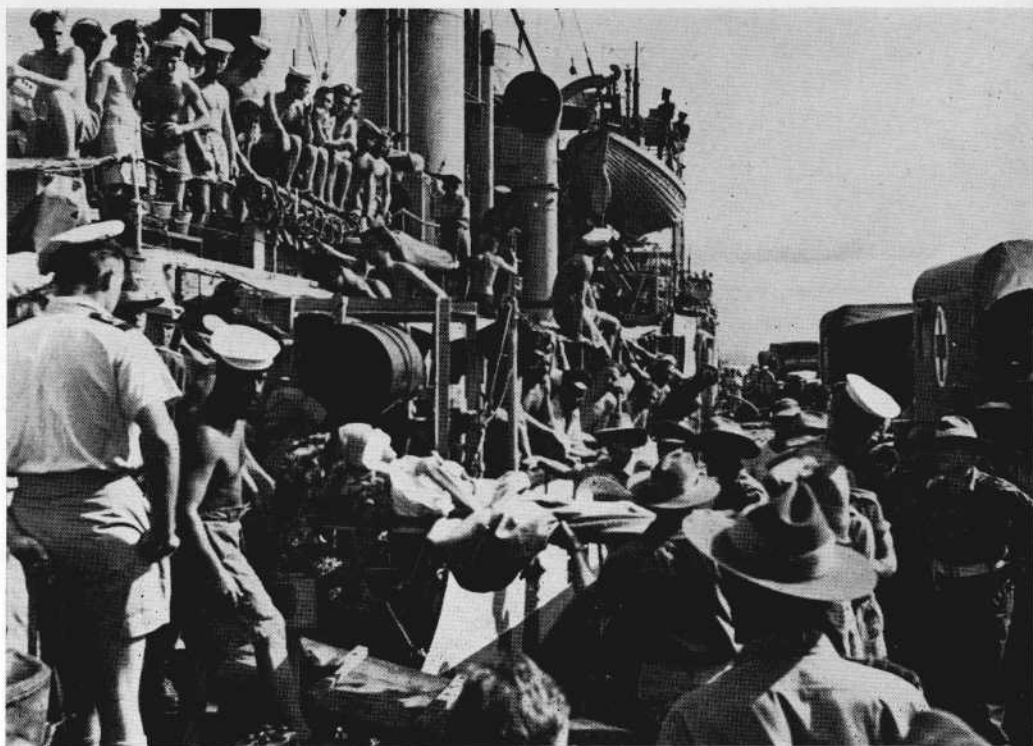
(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Japanese surrender on board U.S.S. *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, 2nd September 1945.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Japanese surrender at Rabaul on board H.M.S. *Glory*, 6th September 1945.



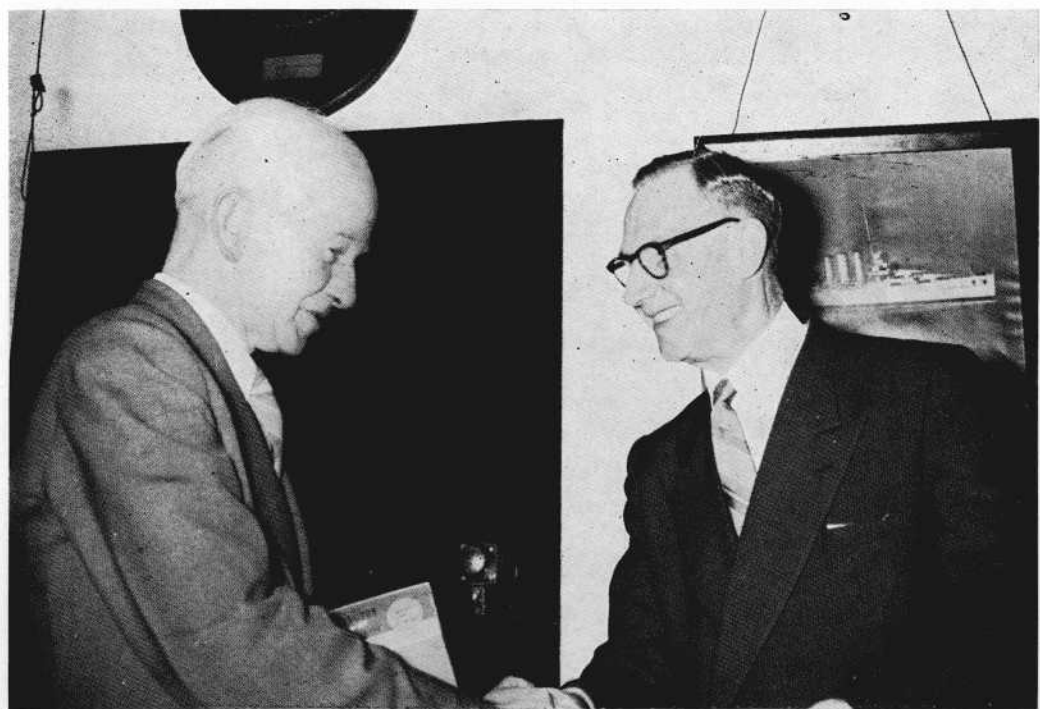
*(Australian War Memorial)*

H.M.A.S. *Glenelg* disembarking Australian prisoners of war from Ambon at Morotai, September 1945.



*(Able Seaman R. F. Smalley)*

Some of the very few civilian survivors from New Ireland, in H.M.A.S. *Swan*, September 1945.



(R.A.N. Historical Section)

Some men "behind the scenes" at Navy Office, Melbourne, throughout the war. *Top left:* Mr A. R. Nankervis, Secretary, Department of the Navy; *top right:* Mr G. L. Macandie, Secretary to the Naval Board; *bottom left:* Mr W. H. Brooksbank, Civil Assistant to the Director of Naval Intelligence, with Mr T. J. Hawkins, Head of the Naval Staff Secretariat.



(Fleet Publications, British Pacific Fleet)

The British Pacific Fleet thanks Australia. Cover of a magazine produced by the British Pacific Fleet, saying "Goodbye" to Australia when the war ended.



interchange of ideas between the scientists carrying out this work in the United Kingdom and those in the United States. By the summer of 1941 the British scientists reported to the Government their view that there was a reasonable chance that an atomic bomb could be produced before the end of the war.

In October 1941 Roosevelt suggested to Churchill that British and American efforts might be jointly conducted. This was done, and a number of British scientists concerned went across to America. Within twelve months this expanded research confirmed the promising forecasts, and a decision had to be reached whether or not to proceed with the construction of large-scale production plants. In June 1942 Churchill made his second wartime visit to Washington. He had various matters to discuss with Roosevelt, and "of these 'Tube Alloys' [the code name for the atomic research] was one of the most complex and, as it proved, overwhelmingly the most important".<sup>8</sup> As a result of the discussions on that visit, Roosevelt decided that the United States would set up the large and enormously costly research plants, and "we therefore took this decision jointly, and settled a basis of agreement. . . . I have no doubt that it was the progress we had made in Britain and the confidence of our scientists in ultimate success imparted to the President that led him to his grave and fateful decision," wrote Churchill.<sup>9</sup>

Progress was such in the development of the atomic bomb that by March 1945 Professor James Chadwick, the British technical adviser to the Combined Policy Committee on atomic affairs in Washington, told Sir John Anderson, the Minister in charge of the British part of the project, that a weapon would be ready in the late summer. The British and Americans had earlier agreed not to use an atomic weapon against a third party without first obtaining each other's consent. American discussion on whether or not to use the atomic bomb had proceeded during the first half of 1945, and preliminary plans for its use had been worked out, and of this Britain was aware. On 2nd July the American Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, presented to President Truman, a memorandum "Proposed Program for Japan", which suggested the presentation of a warning to Japan of the dire results to her of continuing to fight. The memorandum did not specifically mention the bomb, but Stimson said later that "it was of course well forward in our minds, as the memorandum was written and discussed, that the bomb would be the best possible sanction if our warning were rejected". It was decided by the Americans to use it as such a sanction if necessary. British consent in principle to the use of the weapon was given on 4th July. Of this, Churchill later wrote:

The final decision now lay in the main with President Truman, who had the weapon; but I never doubted what it would be, nor have I ever doubted since that he was right. The historic fact remains, and must be judged in the after-time,

<sup>8</sup> Churchill, Vol IV, p. 339.

<sup>9</sup> Vol IV, p. 342.



that the decision whether or not to use the atomic bomb to compel the surrender of Japan was never even an issue. There was unanimous, automatic, unquestioned agreement around our table; nor did I ever hear the slightest suggestion that we should do otherwise.<sup>1</sup>

The existence of the atomic bomb became a reality on 16th July with the successful detonation of a prototype at Alamagordo. Churchill learned of it the next day, when Stimson called on him and placed before him a sheet of paper on which was written, "Babies satisfactorily born." He explained that it meant that the experiment in the Mexican desert had succeeded. "The atomic bomb is a reality."

## V

In Potsdam on 28th July the American Secretary of State, J. F. Byrnes, found the press statement of the Japanese Prime Minister, that his government intended to ignore the Potsdam Declaration, "disheartening". Both he and Truman hoped that before the TERMINAL Conference broke up, the Japanese Government would change its mind.<sup>2</sup> The President had decided to use the bomb if Japan did not accept the Declaration, and on 24th July had issued the necessary order to Twentieth Army Air Force to be ready to "deliver its first special bomb as soon as weather will permit visual bombing after about 3rd August". A list of ten targets, none of which had so far been seriously bombed, had been made earlier in the year. Of these, Hiroshima had been placed first. Before the war the seventh largest city in Japan, with a population of over 250,000, it was a military, administrative and commercial centre, and the main military shipping point in the Home Islands. It combined the desiderata of being of military importance and the right size, as a target.

The operation was to be carried out from, and the bombs sent direct to, the island of Tinian in the Marianas. Not unconnected with the delivery of the bombs to Tinian was the last serious loss suffered by the American Navy during the war. On 26th July U.S.S. *Indianapolis*, after a high speed run from San Francisco, delivered key elements for the bombs at Tinian. She sailed thence to Guam and on 29th July, just before midnight, when bound from that island to Leyte, she was torpedoed by the Japanese submarine *I 58*, and sank with the loss of 878 of her crew of 1,196.

With the break up of the TERMINAL Conference, President Truman flew to England and there, at Plymouth, boarded U.S.S. *Augusta*.<sup>3</sup> It was from the cruiser, on 2nd August, that he gave the final order for the dropping of the atomic bomb. A B29 aircraft, commanded by Colonel Paul W. Tibbets, U.S.A., took off from Tinian at 2.45 a.m. on 6th August. At 9.15 a.m. on the 6th, from an altitude of 31,600 feet, and with the aircraft flying at 328 miles per hour, the world's first atomic bomb was

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, Vol VI, p. 553.

<sup>2</sup> Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly* (1947), p. 263.

<sup>3</sup> *Augusta*, American cruiser (1931), 9,050 tons, nine 8-in and eight 5-in guns, three aircraft, 32½ kts.

dropped on Hiroshima. The results—so far as Hiroshima and its inhabitants were concerned—were catastrophic. More than 60,000 people were killed,<sup>4</sup> thousands more were seriously injured, and everything within the city in an area of over four square miles was razed or fused.

Despite this drastic warning of what continued resistance could bring, and its reinforcement by the Russian declaration of war on Japan and the dropping of the second atomic bomb, on Nagasaki on 9th August, the Japanese leaders could not agree to capitulate. The Emperor and the Prime Minister were in favour of accepting the Potsdam Declaration. But the military leaders were still reluctant to surrender unconditionally. At a meeting of the “Inner Cabinet” held in the early hours of the 10th, the Emperor announced that the war must end, and the Full Cabinet ratified the decision when it met soon afterwards. The news was dispatched through Switzerland at about 7 a.m. on the 10th. About 4 a.m. on 12th August, the American terms for the surrender were broadcast. They were:

From the moment of surrender, the authority of the Emperor and the Japanese Government to rule the state shall be subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers who will take such steps as he deems proper to effectuate the surrender terms.

The Emperor will be required to authorise and ensure the signature by the Government of Japan and the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters of the surrender terms necessary to carry out the provisions of the Potsdam Declaration, and shall issue his commands to all the Japanese military, naval and air authorities and to all the forces under their control wherever located to cease active operations and to surrender their arms, and to issue such other orders as the Supreme Commander may require to give effect to the surrender terms. . . .

The ultimate form of Government of Japan shall, in accordance with the Potsdam Declaration, be established by the freely expressed will of the Japanese people. . . .<sup>5</sup>

The terms were studied at a meeting of the Japanese Cabinet in the afternoon of the 12th, and there was still bitter disagreement whether or not to accept them. At an Imperial Conference on the morning of the 14th the Emperor, after further dispute, repeated that the war must end, and accepted the terms. The Cabinet then formally accepted them. The news was received in Washington at about 4 p.m. on the 14th, and next day the Emperor broadcast to the people of Japan. Dissidents in the Army and Air Force still urged continuance of the war, and efforts were made to stage uprisings throughout the country and to set up a “Government of Resistance”. Not until the end of August did all elements in the armed forces at last accept the national surrender.

During the final days of the war in August the American Third Fleet and the British Pacific Fleet continued their air attacks on and surface bombardments of targets on Honshu and Hokkaido. In a second bombardment, on 9th August, of the ironworks of the Japan Iron Company at Kamaishi, a British bombardment unit comprising H.M.S. *Newfoundland*,

<sup>4</sup> A Japanese official notice of 31st July 1959 (quoted by Morison, Vol XIV, p. 345), stated that the total number of deaths attributed to the bombing of Hiroshima, including all that had occurred in the 14 years since it happened, was 60,175.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Ehrman, Vol VI, p. 312.

H.M.N.Z.S *Gambia* and three destroyers, detached from TF.37, took part with the American battleships, cruisers and destroyers of TF.38.4. Buchanan, in *Napier* with TF.37, reported this and told of heavy air strikes during the day from a position off Sendai. The report continued:

On the 10th the dramatic news of the advent of the Atomic Bomb and Russia's entry into the war against Japan was temporarily overshadowed by the following signal received by TBS at 12.15: "Task Group 37.1 from Commander Task Group 37.1. Following has been read. Japan is willing to surrender under the Potsdam terms provided that it does not prejudice the prerogatives of the Emperor. This statement was issued to the Swiss, Swedish and Russian Governments. As yet there has been no comment."

Meanwhile, though carrier strikes by TF.37 and TF.38 scheduled for the 12th were cancelled owing to the proximity of a typhoon, offensive action continued. But at 8.30 p.m. on the 11th a signal from Admiral Rawlings who, in *King George V* had spent the day in company with Halsey in *Missouri*, hinted at imminent historic happenings. Addressed to all ships of TF.37 it stated that a force consisting of *King George V* and other ships who would be detailed later, would remain in the vicinity of TF.38. All other ships would return to Manus to await orders. The *King George V* force would be held ready to enter a Japanese port when ordered. That force was detailed at 7.35 a.m. next day, the 12th: *King George V*; *Indefatigable*; *Newfoundland*; H.M.N.Z.S. *Gambia*; and ten destroyers, *Troubridge*, *Termagant*, *Terpsichore*, *Teazer*, *Tenacious*,<sup>6</sup> *Barfleur*, *Wakeful*, *Wrangler*,<sup>7</sup> and H.M.A. Ships *Napier* and *Nizam*. The five last named formed the 7th Destroyer Flotilla, with Buchanan Captain (D) in *Napier*. The newly constituted force, under Admiral Rawlings in *King George V*, formed TG.38.5, and came under the command of Vice-Admiral McCain, CTF.38.

Though surrender was nearer it was not yet a fact, and on the 13th air strikes were made, with aircraft from *Indefatigable* striking targets, mainly grounded planes, in the Tokyo area throughout the day. The combined British and American Task Groups retired during the night to fuel, which the ships did on the 14th, and a strike was ordered for the 15th with a directive from CTF.38 that "now is the time to pour it on".<sup>8</sup> The final air strikes against Japan were launched on the 15th. *Napier* recorded that aircraft from *Indefatigable* struck the largest air naval station in Japan, on the shores of Tokyo Bay.

At 0730 a message was received from the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific (Admiral Nimitz) cancelling all air strikes and our aircraft were recalled, landing on *Indefatigable* shortly after 0800, at which time San Francisco Radio announced that Japan had agreed to unconditional acceptance of the terms set out in the Potsdam Declaration.

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<sup>6</sup> HMS's *Termagant*, *Terpsichore*, *Teazer* and *Tenacious*, destroyers (1944), 1,710 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>7</sup> HMS *Wrangler*, destroyer (1944), 1,710 tons, four 4.7-in guns, four 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>8</sup> *Napier's* Report of Proceedings, August 1945.

There was still a shot or two fired. At noon on the 15th, *Napier* recorded:

As *King George V* completed hoisting "Cease Hostilities against Japan", an enemy aircraft was chased out of cloud cover by Corsairs, dropped part of his plane's equipment, causing a large splash, and was shot down in flames close on *King George V*'s starboard beam.

In the early morning of 15th August the Australian Navy's wireless station at Belconnen intercepted a priority signal from Guam "to all U.S. Warships. Cease operations against Japanese forces. Continue searches and patrols. Maintain defensive and internal security measures at highest level and beware of treachery or last moment attacks by enemy forces or individuals." In a signal from Navy Office, Melbourne, timed 6.27 a.m. G.M.T., the Acting First Naval Member, Rear-Admiral Moore (in the absence of Sir Louis Hamilton owing to illness) as Commander South-West Pacific Sea Frontiers told all under his command: "Japan has surrendered. Cease offensive action. Take all wartime precautions for self defence."

During the afternoon TF.38.5 received an emergency message from the Admiralty, time 10.9 a.m. on 15th August, ordering the cessation of hostilities against Japan:

H.M. Government has announced that the Japanese have surrendered. All offensive operations are therefore to cease forthwith. Some time may elapse before the actual instrument of surrender is signed, and before it is clear Japanese forces have received and intend to carry out the instructions of their High Command. Accordingly danger of attack by individual enemy surface craft, U-boats and other craft may persist for some time to come.

Also in the afternoon of the 15th, the Naval Board sent a general signal:

The Naval Board sends to the R.A.N. their warm appreciation of the fighting spirit, devotion to duty and cheerfulness which have been shown by all officers and men during nearly four years of intensive warfare against the Japanese enemy. Sea power assisted by air power stemmed the Japanese advance which in 1942 threatened Australia. The relentlessness of sea power has been largely responsible for destroying the enemy's power of aggression and desire to carry on the war, thus causing him to surrender. In this application of sea power the R.A.N. has played its part with conspicuous efficiency, producing a record of which we can all feel justly proud.

## CHAPTER 28

### SURRENDER—AND AFTERMATH

THE Australian Squadron, TF.74.1, comprising *Shropshire* (broad pendant of Commodore Collins), *Hobart*, *Bataan* and *Warramunga*, received the news of the Japanese surrender in Subic Bay. The squadron dressed ship with masthead flags. Thanksgiving services were held, and Commodore Collins sent the following signal to the ships under his command:

I wish to congratulate every officer and man of His Majesty's Australian Squadron on his share in our final victory announced by the Prime Minister of Great Britain<sup>1</sup> this morning. I rejoice with you that the Japanese have been forced to surrender. We have every reason to be proud of the part played by the Royal Australian Navy during six years of war across the seas of the world, and I say again to all hands "Well Done". Let us always remember with sad pride our lost ships and their companies and thank God that their sacrifice was not in vain.

Press Relations Officer for the R.A.N. on board *Shropshire* was Lieutenant Hall,<sup>2</sup> and in notes he made at the time he told something of how the flagship got the news. It came

almost unbelievably on a windless day of humid heat. . . . The most significant easing of the tension aboard *Shropshire* appeared to be remembrance of what this day would mean at home. A lot of Australian sailors were writing letters. . . . It was the next day that the Squadron let its head go. But there was no wild hilarity, for in the words of the signal made by the Commodore to ships of the Squadron, repeated to H.M.A.S. *Arunta*, who, with the worst of luck, was refitting down south, we would "always remember with sad pride our lost ships and their companies". . . . That was the unspoken feeling of us all.

On 16th August a squadron "At Home" was held in *Shropshire* from 6.30 to 8.30 p.m., when 400 officers from TF.74 and some from H.M.S. *Maidstone*<sup>3</sup> and hospital ship *Oxfordshire* were entertained. "*Merkur* had made an opportune arrival earlier in the afternoon, and the Task Group was stored during the following days."

On 17th August the War Cabinet, meeting in Canberra, defined in a cablegram approved for dispatch to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, the attitude of the Commonwealth Government regarding execution of the surrender terms in the Pacific. The desire that Australia should take part in the occupation of Japan was expressed, and it was proposed to make available for this Task Force 74.1, comprising two cruisers and two destroyers (additional to any H.M.A. Ships which might be sent to Japan), two army brigade groups, and three R.A.A.F. fighter squadrons. It was insisted that "this contribution is being made by Australia as a

<sup>1</sup> Mr Attlee. At the General Election on 26th July the Conservatives were defeated, and at 7 p.m. that day Mr Churchill tendered to the King his resignation as Prime Minister.

<sup>2</sup> Lt B. Y. Hall, RANVR. Major Aust Intelligence Corps 1940-43; RANVR Special Branch. Journalist; of Geelong, Vic; b. Melbourne, 7 May 1896. Died 17 Sep 1967.

<sup>3</sup> HMS *Maidstone*, depot and repair ship (1938), 8,900 tons, eight 4.5-in guns, 17 kts.

separate belligerent of Japan, and that our Force will operate under an Australian Commander who will be subject only to the Supreme Allied Commander". Though unable to provide any Australian Forces for the occupation of Hong Kong, the Commonwealth Government agreed, "at the special request of the R.N. Authorities", to make available for Hong Kong six units of the R.A.N. which would cooperate with two units of the R.N. manned by R.A.N. personnel for minesweeping purposes for a period of two months only.

The Australian Government also agreed to accept "initial responsibility" for Borneo and all Japanese occupied territories to the east thereof, including Ocean Island and Nauru, subject to the provision of shipping. In view of the part played by the 8th Division in Malaya, it sought participation in the re-occupation of Singapore, towards which it would make available a parachute battalion. The Government remarked that a primary consideration was the safe return of Australian prisoners of war, "and we would expect that this should be accorded the highest priority in every respect, including sea, land and air transport". Finally, the cablegram commented:

We feel that we must point out that, in making these contributions, Australia is doing so not as a subsidiary, but as a principal Pacific Power which has for so long borne the heat and burden of the struggle against Japan. We cannot but help feeling that this has not had sufficient recognition in the armistice arrangements.

On 18th August War Cabinet approved of the attachment to the Australian Service Delegation at the Japanese surrender, which was to be led by General Blamey, of officers of the three Services as advisers to him, these to be Commodore Collins and Captain Dowling, Navy, Lieut-General Berryman, Army, and Air Vice-Marshal Bostock and Air Commodore Brownell,<sup>4</sup> Air Force.<sup>5</sup>

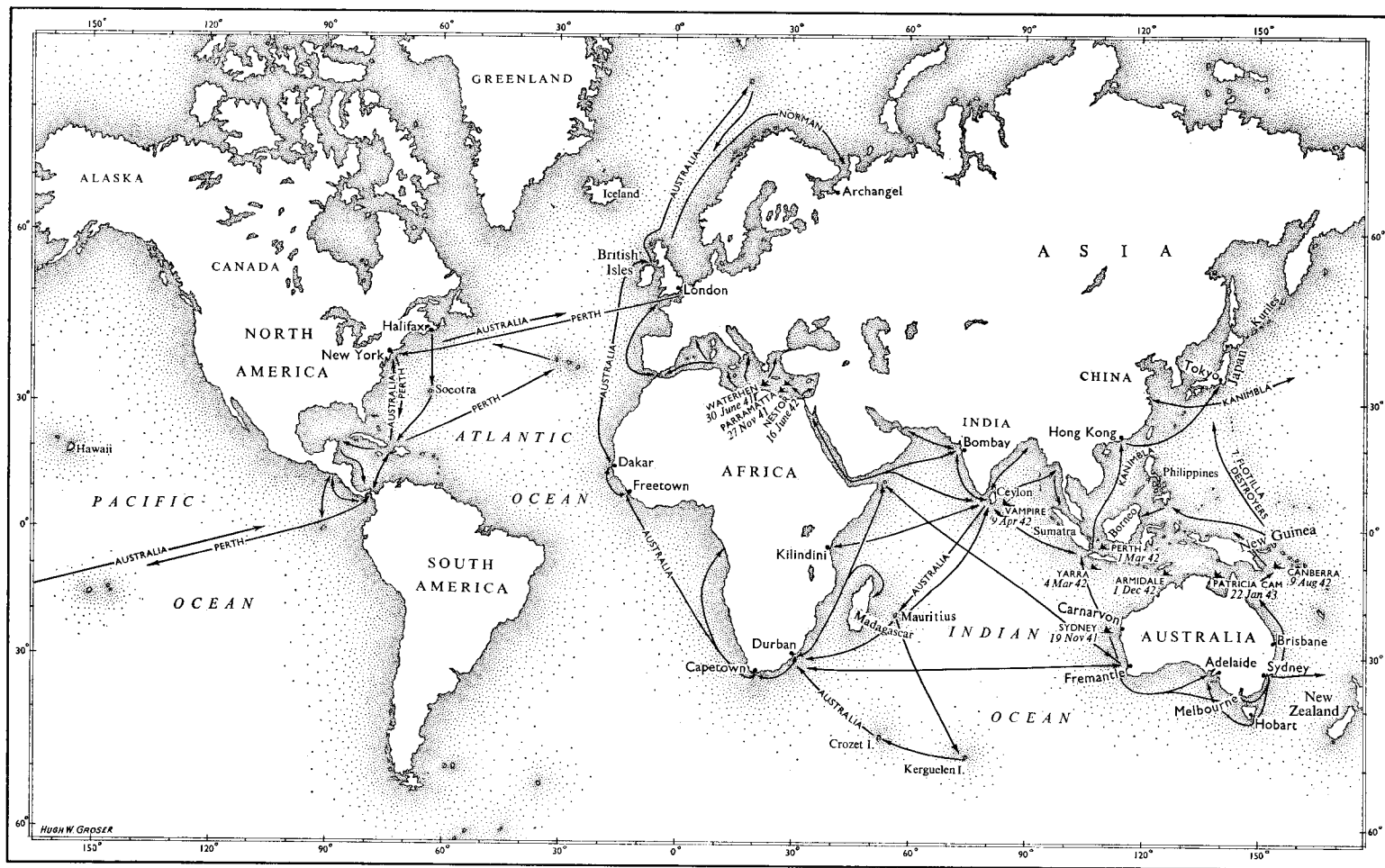
## II

As mentioned, on 12th August the British force to enter a Japanese port—*King George V*, *Indefatigable*, two cruisers and ten destroyers, including H.M.A. Ships *Napier* and *Nizam*—was detailed and designated TG.38.5, as part of TF.38 under the command of Vice-Admiral McCain.

Meanwhile plans had been made for the occupation of Japan, and of the other countries in which were the 3,000,000—estimated by the Japanese Government—men under arms. For the occupation of the Home Islands, it was agreed between General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz, that the American Eighth Army, lifted and supported by Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet, should be responsible for Honshu east of the 135th meridian; Sixth Army and Fifth Fleet should take the key points on western Honshu, Kyushu and Shikoku; XXIV Corps and Admiral Kinkaid's Seventh Fleet should occupy Korea south of latitude 38 degrees north; and Hokkaido

<sup>4</sup> Air Cmdr R. J. Brownell, CBE, MC, MM. Comd Western Cd RAAF 1938-40, RAAF Far East and RAF Stn Sembawang 1940-41; AOC 1 Training Gp 1941-42, Western Area 1943-45, 495 Gp SWPA 1945. Regular air force officer; b. New Town, Tas, 17 May 1894.

<sup>5</sup> Cabinet also approved that Australian Service representatives at the surrender in South-East Asia Command should be Air Vice-Marshal A. T. Cole, Brigadier J. D. Rogers and Acting Captain A. E. Buchanan.



Activities of the R.A.N. in the war—showing R.A.N. ships sunk by enemy action

was assigned to Vice-Admiral Fletcher's North Pacific Force. Admiral Halsey and Third Fleet were given the task of occupying Yokosuka naval base on Tokyo Bay, operating Japanese naval facilities ashore, and helping in the occupation of the Tokyo region.

Part of the landing force for Yokosuka comprised three naval landing battalions, each of about 400 men from TF.38, and one Royal Navy landing battalion contributed by TG.38.5. Of this last mentioned, Captain H. J. Buchanan, Captain (D) of 7th Destroyer Flotilla in *Napier*, was detailed as commander on 14th August. On the 19th the British Landing Force was embarked in three fast destroyer-type transports, U.S. Ships *Sims*, *Pavlic* and *Barr*.<sup>6</sup> Buchanan and his staff<sup>7</sup> boarded *Sims*, and in the afternoon of the 19th the three ships disengaged from TG.38.5 and proceeded to join TG.31.3 (Third Fleet Landing Force) of TF.31 (Yokosuka Occupation Force) under Rear-Admiral O. C. Badger, U.S.N.

In the absence from *Napier* of Buchanan, Lieutenant Stevenson<sup>8</sup> assumed command of the ship. On completion of the transfer of the British Landing Force, TF.38.5 split up into two groups—*King George V*, *Duke of York* (which, flying the flag of Admiral Fraser, had joined the group on 16th August), *Wager*, *Whelp*, *Napier* and *Nizam* formed TG.38.4, and the remainder TG.38.3. On 23rd August Task Force 37, comprising *King George V*, *Newfoundland*, *Gambia*, *Napier* and *Nizam*, was formed and remained in position off the Japanese coast awaiting permission to enter Sagami Wan, at the entrance to Tokyo Bay.

It had been intended that the Yokosuka landing force would go on shore on 26th August, but the proximity of a typhoon imposed delay. It was on the 27th that the Japanese destroyer *Hatsuzakura*, with a number of local pilots on board, made rendezvous with Halsey's flagship *Missouri* at the entrance to Sagami Wan. Soon afterwards, *Missouri*, *Duke of York* and other ships of the Third Fleet entered Sagami Wan. *Napier* recorded the entry:

On the morning of 27th, Task Force 37, preceded by the flagship group (*Missouri* and *Duke of York*) and the American heavy groups, sailed into Sagami Wan by the entrance east of O Shima. The groups in column wheeled round the northern side of the bay and anchored close inshore in the north-east corner, about one mile off the township of Hase. No demonstrations were observed on shore. When *Napier* anchored at 1456, she had steamed 17,008 miles since sailing from Manus on 9th July and steam had been on main engines for 1176 hours.

Next day, after the entrance had been swept, units of the Third Fleet entered Tokyo Bay, and by the 29th three battleships, two cruisers and numerous destroyers were anchored off Yokosuka. At 10 a.m. on the 30th the landings were made there without incident. Next morning, at

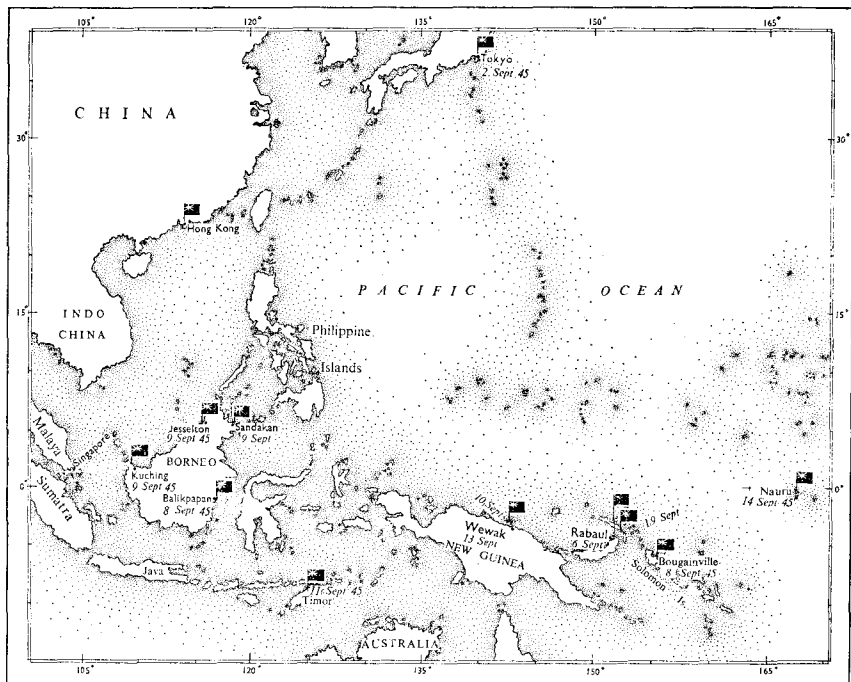
<sup>6</sup> *Pavlic*, *Barr*, US high speed transports (1944), 1,400 tons, three 3-in or two 5-in guns, three 21-in torpedo tubes, 23 kts.

<sup>7</sup> Buchanan's Headquarters Staff included both RN and RAN officers, these last mentioned being Lt G. J. B. Crabb, Lt J. R. McMurray, Surgeon-Lt G. H. B. Brooke and Lt N. O. G. Rees, all of *Napier*, and Lt K. D. Johnson and Gunner A. N. Leary of *Nizam*.

<sup>8</sup> Rear-Adm H. D. Stevenson, RAN. HMAS's *Hobart*, *Nepal* and *Napier*. Of Grafton, NSW; b. Brisbane, 24 Aug 1918.



8 o'clock, H.M.A. Ships *Shropshire*, *Hobart*, *Bataan* and *Warramunga*—now designated TG.70.9—arrived off O Shima, in the entrance to Sagami Wan. The Task Group had left Subic on 17th August, and proceeded via Manila and Okinawa. It entered Tokyo Bay and anchored in assigned berths at noon on the 31st. The Australian group “happily settled in as part of Third Fleet but remained Task Group 70.9”. The small ships of the R.A.N. were among those present, with H.M.A. Ships *Ipswich*, *Ballarat* and *Cessnock* as representatives.



R.A.N. ships at Japanese surrender points

The surrender took place on board the American battleship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on Sunday, 2nd September; a day that “dawned with scattered clouds that dissipated during the morning”. Anchored in Tokyo Bay were 258 warships of all types, from battleships to the smallest beaching craft, representing the Allied nations which had been at war with Japan. Most of the American carriers remained outside the bay in order to launch planes at the appropriate moment.

The Allied representatives at the surrender were headed by General MacArthur as Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers for the surrender and occupation of Japan. Japan's Foreign Minister, Mr Mamotu Shigemitsu, led the Japanese delegation, which included General Yoshijiro

Umezu, Chief of the Army General Staff, and three representatives each from the Foreign Office, the Army and the Navy, the civilians in formal morning dress with top hats. When General MacArthur, with Admirals Nimitz and Halsey, took his place to open the ceremony, he had at his side Lieut-General Jonathan M. Wainwright, U.S. Army, who had surrendered the Philippines in 1942, and Lieut-General Percival, who had surrendered Singapore the same year.

Mr Shigemitsu signed the Instrument of Surrender at 9.4 a.m. on 2nd September 1945,

thus officially ending the war, which had lasted exactly 1364 days, 5 hours and 44 minutes. He was immediately followed as signatory by General Umezu. General of the Army Douglas MacArthur then signed the acceptance of the surrender for all Allied powers. Next Fleet Admiral Nimitz, with Admiral Halsey and Rear-Admiral Forrest Sherman as supporters, signed for the United States. Then, in order, came General Hsu Yung-Chang for China, Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser R.N. for the United Kingdom, Lieut-General Derevyanko for the Soviet Union, General Sir Thomas Blamey for Australia, Colonel Moore Cosgrave for Canada, General Jacques Le Clerc for France, Admiral Helfrich for the Netherlands, and Air Vice-Marshal Isitt<sup>9</sup> for New Zealand.<sup>1</sup>

Among those on board *Missouri* for the surrender ceremony were the Australian representatives. Commodore Collins, in his Squadron Report for the period, commented briefly:

Sunday, 2nd September, was the day of the signing of the surrender in *Missouri*. Ships were dressed with masthead flags. I joined the Australian delegation when they boarded *Missouri* from the destroyer that had brought them from Yokohama. The ceremony of surrender was simple and impressive. I was particularly interested to meet again General Percival who looked little the worse for his experiences at Singapore.

Of the ships of the Australian Squadron, *Hobart* and *Warramunga* sailed for Sydney for refit during September. *Shropshire* and *Bataan* remained in Japanese waters until November. Before *Warramunga* sailed for Sydney, she and *Bataan*, as members of Task Units comprising American, British and Australian ships, made three voyages from Tokyo to Hamamatsu, Sendai, and Kamaishi. On each trip the American Hospital Ship *Rescue* (6,185 tons) was one of the units and the object of each operation was the removal of prisoners of war from Japanese prison camps and, after "processing" them in *Rescue*, forwarding them by destroyer to Yokohama for onward passage. Processing consisted of medical attention, delousing, bathing and reclothing. When the physical condition of a prisoner of war did not come up to a reasonable standard, he was retained in the hospital ship.

It was on the Sendai operation that Commander Burrell in *Bataan* learned that among the prisoners of war taken from Tokushima Camp were some from H.M.A.S. *Perth*.

<sup>9</sup> AVM Sir Leonard Isitt, KBE. Chief of Air Staff, RNZAF 1943-46. B. Christchurch, NZ, 27 Jul 1891.

<sup>1</sup> Morison, Vol XIV, p. 366.

Later that forenoon [on 12th September] I received word from Lieut-Commander P. E. Carr<sup>2</sup> that he had just arrived on board *Rescue* together with Lieut-Commander P. O. L. Owen,<sup>3</sup> Engineer Lieutenant W. C. Warner,<sup>4</sup> Lieutenant W. L. Gay,<sup>5</sup> and Engineer Sub-Lieutenant T. F. Robbins.<sup>6</sup> The news was the greatest thrill for us all. With Lieut-Commander Dine<sup>7</sup> I boarded *Rescue*. The Commanding Officer was most helpful in giving them top priority in the "processing" routine and arranging for them to embark in *Bataan* pending their departure. My words cannot express their joy at deliverance to say nothing of ours. Provisions and clothing had been dropped at their camp by Naval aircraft so signs of extreme malnutrition had begun to wear off. However their reports will show their lot in Japanese hands was no different to those which have shocked the civilised world.<sup>8</sup>

On that Sendai trip *Warramunga* embarked 179 persons, including 32 women and 15 children. Of the total, the largest number of those of any one nation were the 79 English, which included 21 women and 10 children. In all, thirteen nationalities were represented, including five Australians, and African natives, Indians, Malaysians, Americans, Spaniards, Armenians, Greeks, Arabs and Javanese. Commander M. J. Clark, commanding officer of *Warramunga*, described the ship's passenger list as "a very mixed bag, but in many ways reminiscent of the 'Tobruk Ferry'."

### III

On the day of the main surrender in Tokyo, 2nd September, the South-West Pacific Command ceased to exist. Command of the Navy reverted to the Naval Board, of the Army to the Commander-in-Chief, and of the Air Force to the Air Board. This was, as is remarked elsewhere in these histories,<sup>9</sup> "a somewhat precipitate decision in view of the fact that the formal surrender of the Japanese forces and the re-occupation of Allied territory would involve combined operations on a fairly large scale".

As mentioned, on 2nd August Mountbatten was directed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff that his primary task was the opening of the Straits of Malacca at the earliest possible moment. And he was told that the eastern boundary of his command would be extended to include Borneo, Java and Celebes. On 14th August, when the Japanese Government capitulated, he was ordered to take over his new area the following day. He had intended to launch his assault, ZIPPER, against the west coast of

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Cdr P. E. Carr, DFC; RAN. HMAS's *Perth* and *Australia*, HMS's *Condor*, *Jackdaw*, *Hermes* (814 Sqn) and *Lanka*; attached to RAAF for torpedo and minelaying duties in NG 1943. Of Toorak, Vic; b. Toorak, 25 Feb 1908.

<sup>3</sup> Lt-Cdr P. O. L. Owen; RAN. HMAS's *Stuart*, *Napier*, *Hobart*, *Perth*. Of Melbourne; b. Harrow, England, 26 Nov 1908.

<sup>4</sup> Engineer Lt W. C. Warner; RANR. HMAS *Canberra* and MV *Hauraki*. Merchant seaman; of Sydney; b. Newcastle, NSW, 31 Jul 1903.

<sup>5</sup> Lt W. L. Gay; RAN. HMAS's *Vampire*, *Stuart* and *Perth*. Of Balwyn, Vic; b. Coburg, Vic, 7 Nov 1917.

<sup>6</sup> Engineer Sub-Lt T. F. Robbins; RANVR. HMAS *Perth*. Of Adelaide; b. 7 Sep 1918.

<sup>7</sup> Capt L. N. Dine; RAN. HMAS's *Perth*, *Nepal*, *Shropshire* and *Bataan*. B. Randwick, NSW, 11 Sep 1910.

<sup>8</sup> *Bataan*, Letter of Proceedings, period 9th to 19th September 1945.

<sup>9</sup> Long, *The Final Campaigns*, p. 552.

Malaya on 9th September, and now decided that this operation should proceed substantially as planned, and that the East Indies Fleet should anticipate it by occupying Penang and Singapore.

But on 19th August MacArthur, as Supreme Commander, issued an order that no landings were to take place, and no surrender documents were to be signed by Japanese field commanders, until after the main surrender ceremonies in Tokyo Bay. At the time of the issue of this order, virtually the whole East Indies Fleet, with every available minesweeper, was steaming towards the Malayan peninsula, under the command of Vice-Admiral Walker,<sup>1</sup> with the intention of occupying Penang, which was urgently needed as an advanced base for clearing the approaches to Singapore.

The MacArthur injunction dislocated that arrangement made for South-East Asia, and Walker had to take his fleet under the lee of the Nicobars to fill in time, refuel and provision his smaller vessels. He finally arrived off Penang on 28th August. Minesweepers started their preliminary work, negotiations were opened with the Japanese commanders, and on 2nd September Walker accepted their surrender on board his flagship *Nelson*. Next day the Royal Marines of the fleet landed at Penang. Meanwhile the naval Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir Arthur Power, had gone ahead from Penang towards Singapore in the cruiser *Cleopatra*. On 3rd September she and the 6th Minesweeping Flotilla entered the port, and next day the cruiser *Sussex* arrived with a convoy carrying the 5th Indian Division. On 9th September the ZIPPER assault forces reached Port Swettenham and Port Dickson, and within three days over 100,000 men had landed.

A few days earlier—and before the signing of the main surrender in Tokyo Bay—British and Australian ships entered Hong Kong. On 13th August the Admiralty had signalled instructions regarding its re-occupation to Admiral Fraser, but “the susceptibilities of General Chiang Kai-shek, the difficulties produced by General MacArthur’s order already referred to, and American reluctance to involve themselves in any way in the recovery of a British colonial territory necessitated a long interchange of messages before the matter was settled”.<sup>2</sup> It was finally arranged that Rear-Admiral Harcourt, who had recently arrived on the station in command of the 11th Aircraft Carrier Squadron—*Venerable*, *Vengeance*, *Colossus* and *Glory*<sup>3</sup>—should take a squadron in to Hong Kong. Task Group 111.2 was formed at Subic Bay. It comprised *Indomitable* (flag), *Venerable*, cruisers *Swiftsure* and *Euryalus*, four destroyers, the submarine depot ship *Maidstone* and the 8th Submarine Flotilla, and eight Australian corvettes—H.M.A. Ships *Mildura* (Lieut-Commander Little<sup>4</sup> (S.O.)),

<sup>1</sup> Admiral Sir Harold Walker, KCB; RN. Comd HMAS *Canberra* 1934-36, HMS *Barham* 1939-40, 5 Cruiser Sqn 1944, 3 Battle Sqn 1944-45. B. 18 Mar 1891.

<sup>2</sup> Roskill, Vol III, Part II, p. 383.

<sup>3</sup> HMS's *Venerable*, *Vengeance*, *Colossus*, *Glory*, light fleet aircraft carriers (1943-45), 13,190 tons, four 3-pdr guns, twenty-four 2-pdr pom-poms, nineteen 40-mm AA guns, 35 aircraft, 25 kts.

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Cdr J. M. Little, OBE; RANR. HMAS *Moresby*; comd HMAS's *Kybra* 1941-42, *Bingera* 1942-43, *Mildura* 1943-45. Merchant seaman; of South Yarra, Vic; b. 27 Jun 1905.

*Castlemaine* (Lieutenant Moss<sup>5</sup>), *Bathurst* (Lieut-Commander Stewart<sup>6</sup>), *Broome* (Lieut-Commander Denovan), *Fremantle* (Lieutenant Boulton<sup>7</sup>), *Strahan* (Lieutenant Burke<sup>8</sup>), *Wagga* (Lieut-Commander Guille) and *Stawell* (Lieut-Commander Griffith). These ships had not worked together previously as a minesweeping unit, and the period 21st to 26th August was spent in Subic Bay working up into a minesweeping flotilla "with very satisfactory results".<sup>9</sup>

*Stawell*—which a few days earlier had fought a night engagement with, and sunk, an armed Japanese barge north of the eastern tip of Celebes—to the regret of all on board was denied the Hong Kong operation, since she was retained in Subic Bay to act as British Naval Liaison Officer for the port. The rest of the R.A.N. Flotilla sailed from Subic Bay at 7 a.m. on 27th August in company with *Maidstone*, the 8th Submarine Flotilla, and the Canadian armed merchant cruiser *Prince Robert* (6,892 tons), as TU.111.2.8, for Hong Kong.

Sweeping of the approaches to Hong Kong commenced at dawn on 29th August, and next day the flotilla swept the channel into the harbour. On the 30th,

after a sweep of four laps of three miles had been completed in the approaches to Tathong Channel, H.M.S. *Kempfenfelt*<sup>1</sup> entered, followed by H.M. Ships *Swiftsure* [to which Harcourt had transferred his flag for the operation], *Ursula*, *Euryalus*, H.M.C.S. *Prince Robert*, H.M.A. Ships *Mildura* and *Bathurst*. Ships continued into harbour without incident, and anchored off the Naval Dockyard.

During succeeding days more R.A.N. corvettes arrived at Hong Kong and carried out minesweeping, anti-piracy patrols and other duties. On 17th September H.M.A.S. *Ballarat* (S.O. 21st Minesweeping Flotilla) arrived, and next day took over as Senior Officer Minesweepers. There were then 19 Australian ships in the port: 21st Minesweeping Flotilla—*Ballarat* (Commander Read), *Bendigo* (Lieutenant Jackson), *Whyalla* (Lieutenant Parry<sup>2</sup>), *Maryborough* (Lieut-Commander Lancaster<sup>3</sup>), *Burnie* (Lieut-Commander Andrewartha); 22nd Flotilla—*Cessnock* (Lieutenant Chapman<sup>4</sup>), *Geraldton* (Commander Travis), *Gawler* (Lieut-Commander Dixon), *Wollongong* (Lieutenant Hare), *Tamworth* (Lieutenant Lloyd-Jones), *Pirie* (Lieutenant Mackenzie<sup>5</sup>), *Launceston*

<sup>5</sup> Lt F. R. B. Moss; RANVR. RN 1941-42; HMAS's *Wallaroo* and *Horsham*; comd HMAS *Castlemaine* 1945. Of Fremantle, WA; b. 6 Oct 1907.

<sup>6</sup> Lt-Cdr K. O. Stewart; RANR. HMAS's *Ballarat*, *Bingera*, *Doomba*; comd HMAS *Bathurst* 1945-46. Of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 25 Sep 1912.

<sup>7</sup> Lt-Cdr A. N. Boulton; RANR. Comd HMAS's *Marrawah* 1942, *Fremantle* 1943-46. Merchant seaman; of Austimmer, NSW; b. Barking, England, 24 Jul 1904.

<sup>8</sup> Lt-Cdr W. H. Burke; RANR. HMAS's *Manoora*, *Narani*, *Warnambool* and *Bathurst*; comd HMAS *Strahan* 1945. Of Sydney; b. 20 Jan 1915.

<sup>9</sup> HMAS *Mildura*'s Report of Proceedings.

<sup>1</sup> HMS *Kempfenfelt*, destroyer (1944), 1,730 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Cdr G. L. B. Parry; RANVR. RN 1941-44; HMAS *Geraldton*; comd HMAS *Whyalla* 1945-46. Of Sydney; b. Sydney, 1 Aug 1904.

<sup>3</sup> Lt-Cdr M. W. Lancaster; RAN. HMAS *Bungaree*; comd HMAS *Maryborough* 1944-45. B. Shepparton, Vic, 7 Feb 1902.

<sup>4</sup> Lt A. G. Chapman; RANR. HMAS's *Westralia*, *Adelaide*, *Assault*, *Kanimbla*; comd HMAS's *Geraldton* 1944, *Cessnock* 1944-45. Merchant seaman; of Sydney; b. 15 May 1909.

<sup>5</sup> Lt-Cdr C. K. Mackenzie; RANVR. RN 1941-45; comd HMAS *Pirie* 1945-46. Of Fremantle, WA; b. Sydney, 15 Nov 1909.

(Lieut-Commander Barron); and, attached from Seventh Fleet, *Strahan*, *Fremantle*, *Wagga*, *Mildura*, *Bathurst*, *Broome* and *Castlemaine*. H.M.A. Ships *Stawell*, *Goulburn* and *Toowoomba* (Lieutenant Goodwin<sup>6</sup>) arrived soon afterwards. The organisation of the port of Hong Kong was in process, and it fell to Read to carry on the immediate administration of all Australian ships there, plus the operational control, planning and analysis of all moored minesweeping.

#### IV

The first of the surrenders in the Australian area was at Rabaul on 6th September. At the request of the Australian Army authorities for a large ship on which to conduct the surrender ceremony, Admiral Fraser made the aircraft carrier *Glory* available, and she proceeded to Jacquinot Bay. The commander of the *Eighth Area Army*, General Hitoshi Imamura, refused to discuss surrender until the signing in Tokyo was completed, and he had received direct orders. When these were received, arrangements for a meeting of envoys were made, and on 2nd September Brigadier Sheehan, General Sturdee's senior staff officer, and the N.O.I.C. New Guinea, Captain Morris,<sup>7</sup> embarked in H.M.A.S. *Vendetta* in Jacquinot Bay and proceeded to a rendezvous off Rabaul, half a mile from Crater Peninsula. Two boats flying the Japanese ensign and the white flag were there, and two Japanese envoys, Captain Sanagi of the Navy and Colonel Takahasi of the Army, boarded *Vendetta*. Details of the surrender were settled and *Vendetta* returned to Jacquinot Bay.

H.M.S. *Glory*, with General Sturdee and his staff on board, left Jacquinot Bay on 5th September. There also proceeded from Jacquinot Bay to a rendezvous off Tawui Point, New Britain, the sloop H.M.S. *Hart*;<sup>8</sup> and H.M.A. Ships *Vendetta*, *Kiama*, *Dubbo*, *Lithgow*, *Townsville*, *Reserve*, and M.L's 808 and 811. Rendezvous was made at 6 a.m. on the 6th, and *Hart* and *Vendetta* proceeded at once to Kabanga Bay, on the Gazelle Peninsula, and *Hart* embarked General Imamura and his staff and transported them to H.M.S. *Glory*.

There, on the carrier's flight deck, the surrender ceremony was enacted during a period of forty minutes, while *Glory*'s Corsair aircraft did the victory roll overhead. General Sturdee signed the Instrument of Surrender for the Allies, and General Imamura and—at his request—Vice-Admiral Kusaka, Commander of the *South-East Area Fleet*, for the Japanese. The Japanese party consisted of sixteen members, and the ceremony was watched by 1,000 officers, ratings and marines of H.M.S. *Glory*.

The surrender instructions signed by the Japanese were:

To Japanese forces in New Guinea, New Britain, New Ireland, Bougainville, and adjacent islands. I, the Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Imperial South-Eastern Army, hereby surrender to the General Officer Commanding First Australian Army

<sup>6</sup> Lt-Cdr H. F. Goodwin, MBE; RANR. HMAS's *Westralia*, *Adele*, *Manoora*, *Whyalla*, *Bowen*; comd HMAS *Toowoomba* 1945-46. Of Adelaide; b. Adelaide, 2 Sep 1915.

<sup>7</sup> Morris was appointed NOIC New Guinea, with the rank of acting captain, in July 1945.

<sup>8</sup> HMS *Hart*, sloop (1944), 1,430 tons, six 4-in guns, 20 kts.

all Japanese armed forces under my command, in accordance with the instrument of surrender issued by the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters, and Government and General Order No. 1, military and naval, issued by the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters. I will henceforth, and until otherwise directed by you or your successor, carry out the orders issued by you or your staff on your behalf to the best of my ability, and I will take action to ensure that my subordinate commanders carry out orders issued by your representative.

Approximately 139,000 Japanese were involved in the surrender. Mine-sweeping operations by the Australian corvettes and M.L.'s commenced at 11 a.m. on the 6th, and the entrance to Blanche Bay was opened up. At 5 p.m. *Vendetta* led the remainder of the ships into Simpson Harbour. As was so at Massawa on 14th April 1941<sup>9</sup> and Akyab on 3rd January 1945, Australian naval officers were the first to land at Rabaul after enemy occupation. On the morning of the 7th, Captain Morris and Lieutenant Hancock<sup>1</sup> landed, unarmed, from *Vendetta* and brought off 28 European prisoners of war.

## V

Two days after the Rabaul surrender, that at Bougainville was effected. There, as soon as "Cease Fire" had been ordered on 15th August, the Australian military authorities in south Bougainville began to make arrangements for the surrender of the Japanese. The first contact with a Japanese envoy was on 18th August at Mivo Crossing, where surrender arrangements were discussed. Lieut-General Kanda, commanding the Japanese *XVII Army*, was ordered by Lieut-General Savige,<sup>2</sup> commanding II Corps, to go with the Japanese naval commander and two other officers, in a barge flying a white flag, to a rendezvous off Moila Point and be there at 8 a.m. on 20th August.

H.M.A.S. *Lithgow* (Lieutenant Champion<sup>3</sup>) was engaged on anti-barge patrols during August, before the Japanese capitulation, in company with *ML808* (Lieutenant D. A. P. Smith), *ML818* (Lieutenant Nicholls<sup>4</sup>) and *ML820* (Lieutenant Milne), and on the 9th bombarded Japanese positions on the east coast of Bougainville. She was in Torokina when news of the cessation of hostilities was received, and on the 19th, with N.O.I.C. North Solomons, Commander Fowler<sup>5</sup> on board, proceeded to the rendezvous off Moila Point, the southern extremity of Bougainville. The Japanese barges were there at the appointed time on 20th August, but not General Kanda. Instead, Captain Takenaka, one of his staff officers,

<sup>9</sup> *Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942*, p. 372.

<sup>1</sup> Lt-Cdr K. W. Hancock, RANR and RANVR. Sec to NOIC Townsville; HMAS's *Warramunga* and *Ballarat*; Sec to NOIC New Guinea Area. Shipping clerk; of Fremantle, WA; b. Fremantle, 30 May 1918.

<sup>2</sup> Lt-Gen Sir Stanley Savige, KBE, CB, DSO, MC, ED. Comd 17 Bde 1939-41; GOC 3 Div 1942-44, I Corps and NG Force 1944, II Corps 1944-45. Company director; of Melbourne; b. Morwell, Vic, 26 Jun 1890. Died 15 May 1954.

<sup>3</sup> Cdr G. S. H. Champion, RD; RANR. HMAS *Kanimbla*; comd HMAS's *ML425* 1943-44, *Lithgow* 1945. Merchant service cadet; of Cremorne, NSW; b. Manly, NSW, 29 Jan 1919.

<sup>4</sup> Lt H. M. Nicholls; RANVR. RN 1941-42; comd HMAS's *ML818* 1943-45, *ML825* 1945, *ML818* 1945. Of Hobart; b. Hobart, 24 Jul 1904.

<sup>5</sup> Cdr A. E. Fowler; RAN. NOIC Torokina 1945, Madang 1945-46. Of Sydney; b. Rooty Hill, NSW, 5 Sep 1898.

brought a message from Kanda stating that he had received no instructions from Imamura at Rabaul, and that he "would come in as soon as he was authorised". This authority from Imamura for Kanda to surrender to General Savige on 8th September was eventually received.

Another rendezvous off Moila Point was accordingly arranged for the morning of the 8th. H.M.A.S. *Diamantina*<sup>6</sup> (Lieut-Commander Rose<sup>7</sup>) embarked Commander Fowler, and at 8 a.m. on the 8th the frigate, with *ML816* (Lieutenant McLaren) was at the meeting place. At 8.15 a.m. the Japanese barge closed *Diamantina*, and General Kanda boarded.

Kanda looked a very tired, sick, old man as he was helped over the side of the barge by one of the crew, and on coming aboard H.M.A.S. *Diamantina* appeared stunned and unable to comprehend all that was going on around him. He was followed by his chief of staff, Major-General Makata, Vice-Admiral Baron Samejima, Commander Ikegama, and Lieut-Commander Shinkawa, the latter bearing two beautifully made boxes wrapped in oiled silk, "presents for General Savige from General Kanda".<sup>8</sup>

*Diamantina* proceeded to Torokina, where the Japanese were disembarked at noon. There, at corps headquarters, the surrender ceremony was carried out at 12.30. Subsequently the five Japanese were embarked in M.L.'s *804* (Lieutenant Brooker) and *820*, and taken to the mouth of the Mivo River, where they transferred to barges and returned to General Kanda's headquarters.

## VI

On the day of the surrender of General Kanda at Bougainville, Vice-Admiral Kamada surrendered all the Japanese forces in Dutch Borneo to Major-General Milford, G.O.C., 7th Australian Division. There were meetings between parties of Australians and Japanese from 2nd September onwards, and wireless contact was established with Kamada at Samarinda on the 4th. As a result a rendezvous was arranged off the mouth of the Dundang River, about 20 miles south-east of Samarinda, for the 8th.

At 8 a.m. on 6th September H.M.A.S. *Burdekin* (Lieut-Commander Marchington) sailed from Morotai for Balikpapan, where she arrived at 7.40 a.m. on the 8th. There she embarked General Milford and his staff, and a number of senior Army, R.A.A.F., and U.S. Navy officers, and proceeded to the rendezvous. The ship anchored there at 11.6 a.m. At 11.30 Admiral Kamada, with two staff officers and an interpreter, arrived alongside *Burdekin* in *PT377*, and boarded ten minutes later.

A surrender table had been arranged on the starboard side of *Burdekin*'s quarterdeck. The Japanese were received on board by the First Lieutenant, and taken to their position forward of the table, facing aft. General Milford and Commander Marchington then proceeded to the table. A number of questions were put to Admiral Kamada, and when the matter of signing the surrender was raised he said that he would sign on behalf

<sup>6</sup> HMAS *Diamantina*, frigate (1945), 1,420 tons, two 4-in guns, 20 kts.

<sup>7</sup> Lt-Cdr M. G. Rose; RANVR. RN 1940-44; comd *Diamantina* 1945. Of Sydney; b. Reading, England, 22 Sep 1902.

<sup>8</sup> Commander A. E. Fowler, Report of Surrender Operations in the Norsols Area.



of the Japanese Navy only. General Milford thereupon adopted a strong tone. The Instrument of Surrender was produced, and Kamada signed.

Vice-Admiral Kamada was visibly affected throughout the ceremony, and particularly so when laying his sword before General Milford at the table. He had not a cruel nor particularly unpleasant face, and favourably impressed those present. . . . The surrender gave great satisfaction to the ship's company, most of whom were able to witness it from various positions.

At the conclusion of the surrender ceremony, Admiral Kamada and his staff disembarked, and at 1.30 p.m. on the 8th *Burdekin* weighed and proceeded for Balikpapan. At 3 p.m. she was joined by H.M.A.S. *Gascoyne* (Lieutenant Peel) with the Commanding General of II Army, Lieut-General Fusataro Teshima, and staff, embarked, and the two ships proceeded in company to Balikpapan, where they arrived at 4.16 p.m.

It had originally been intended that *Gascoyne* should be the venue of the Kamada surrender. From 1st to 6th September she, H.M.A.S. *Inverell* (Lieutenant Chapman<sup>9</sup>) and *HDML1359* (Lieutenant Hard<sup>1</sup>) were at Balikpapan. On 5th September *Gascoyne* was detailed to proceed to Pare Pare, Celebes, there to embark Teshima on 7th September and convey him to Balikpapan, to be taken thence by air to Morotai for the surrender to General Blamey of all Japanese forces under his control. *Gascoyne* arrived at Pare Pare at 10 a.m. on the 7th, one hour before the time appointed for the rendezvous with the Japanese. Teshima, however, punctiliously awaited orders from higher authority before surrendering, and it was not until after midnight on the 7th that he boarded *Gascoyne*, with a staff of six and four servants; and it was 0035 on the 8th before *Gascoyne* sailed. In the meantime *Burdekin* was substituted to be the scene of the Kamada surrender. On the arrival of the two ships at Balikpapan in the late afternoon of the 8th, *Gascoyne* disembarked General Teshima and his party, who went on by air to Morotai, where the surrender ceremony took place next day.

The surrender ceremony, reported the N.O.I.C. Moluccas, Captain Walsh, "was a most impressive one and was witnessed by 10,000 Service personnel".<sup>2</sup> The naval representative in the Japanese surrender party was Captain Oyama. The ceremony took place on the I Corps sports ground.

At 10.50 a.m. on 9th September the troops and the Japanese party were in position, the Japanese standing about 10 yards from a table. At 10.58 the parade was called to attention. At 11 o'clock General Blamey arrived at the table and a guard gave the general salute. General Blamey then read the terms of surrender. General Teshima moved forward to the table and signed the document of surrender. Then

<sup>9</sup> Cdr A. I. Chapman; RANR. HMS *Arawa* and HMAS *Whyalla*; comd HMAS's *Abraham Crijnsen* 1942-43, *Inverell* 1943-46. Merchant seaman; of Glenunga, SA; b. 11 Jan 1916.

<sup>1</sup> Lt A. H. G. Hard; RANR. HMAS's *Moresby*, *Manoora*, *ML424*, *ML817*, *ML812*; comd *HDML1359* 1944-46. Of Port Melbourne, Vic; b. Oxford, England, 14 Jul 1919.

<sup>2</sup> The official party comprised Captain Walsh, Air Commodore Brownell, RAAF, Major-General H. H. Johnson, US Forces, Major-General N. L. W. Van Straten, NEI Forces, Major-General L. E. Beavis, Major-General C. E. M. Lloyd, Lieut-General Sir Leslie Morshead, Lieut-General Berryman and Major-General C. S. Steele.

Blamey signed the document and handed Teshima a written instruction—"Second Japanese Army Instruction No. 1."<sup>3</sup>

On the day of the surrender at Morotai, H.M.A.S. *Bundaberg* (Lieut-Commander MacDonald, Senior R.A.N. Officer, West Borneo) was at Labuan with forces under his control comprising H.M.A.S. *Kapunda* (Lieutenant Ford<sup>4</sup>) and H.M.A. Ships *Mother Snake*, *Black Snake*, *Tiger Snake*, *River Snake*;<sup>5</sup> AM's 1629, 1499, 1985, 1983; HDML1343; R.A.N. Beach Commandos. At 6 a.m. on the 9th *Kapunda* embarked 64 A.I.F. troops and sailed for the Sarawak River, where she arrived at 2 p.m. on the 10th. Here she searched a channel to Kuching in readiness for the arrival of a convoy from Labuan to occupy Kuching with the primary object of securing the release of approximately 2,000 Allied prisoners of war and internees. This convoy, including U.S. Ships *Willoughby* and *Barnes*,<sup>6</sup> arrived off the Sarawak River at 7 a.m. on the 11th; and *Kapunda* entered the river, and was boarded at 9.45 a.m. by Brigadier Eastick,<sup>7</sup> commanding Kuching Force, and staff.

*Kapunda* assumed duty as Headquarters Ship and led the convoy up the river, and anchored off Pending Jetty. Here, after some delay, Major-General H. Yamamura, commanding the Japanese in the area, boarded *Kapunda* at 2.35 p.m. At 2.45, on the forecastle of *Kapunda*, Yamamura signed the surrender document and surrendered his sword to Brigadier Eastick. With Brigadier Eastick were *Kapunda*'s commanding officer, Lieutenant Ford, Captain Jennings, U.S.N.R., the commanding officer of U.S.S. *Barnes*, Commander Ingle, U.S.N.R., and the commanding officer U.S. P.T. Flotilla, Lieut-Commander Fargo. The ceremony was simple and impressive. A guard, consisting of twelve *Kapunda* ratings and twelve men of the 2/4th Pioneer Battalion, was fallen in on the forward deck, and the remainder of the ship's company were along the ship's side in two lines. At 4.21 p.m. *Kapunda* weighed and proceeded upstream to Kuching where, at 5.58 p.m. on the 11th, she secured alongside Steamship Wharf, "the first H.M.A. Ship to enter Kuching",

and I would think that this is the first time that the White Ensign has flown at Kuching in many years. . . . It was a memorable day and a very successful one. No hitches occurred and commanding officers and ships' companies of the smaller H.M.A. Ships concerned are to be congratulated for their efficiency and smartness during the operation.<sup>8</sup>

For some days after the surrender, *Bundaberg*, who arrived at Kuching on the 12th, and her force were at Kuching in an operation in which the ships of the force landed an occupation force of 3,000 with ancillary

<sup>3</sup> Long, *The Final Campaigns*, pp. 553-4.

<sup>4</sup> Lt A. J. Ford; RANR. HMAS's *Launceston* and *Bathurst*; comd HMAS *Kapunda* 1945-46. Of Melbourne; b. Mordialloc, Vic, 10 Jul 1916.

<sup>5</sup> *Mother Snake* 300 tons, others 80 tons.

<sup>6</sup> *Barnes*, US aircraft carrier (1943), 7,800 tons, two 5-in guns, 28 aircraft, 17 kts.

<sup>7</sup> Brig T. C. Eastick, CMG, DSO, ED. CO 2/7 Fd Regt 1940-43; CRA 7 Div 1943-44, 9 Div 1944-46 (comd Kuching Force 1945). Engineer; of Reade Park, SA; b. Hyde Park, SA, 3 May 1900.

<sup>8</sup> Lt A. J. Ford, commanding officer, HMAS *Kapunda*—Special Report of Proceedings on the Occasion of the Surrender of Kuching.

stores, and transported 2,017 Allied prisoners of war—of whom 400 were stretcher cases—to Labuan. In addition *Bundaberg* and *Kapunda* effected repairs to the waterfront, which was in “a shocking condition”. *Kapunda* carried out surveillance of the Natuna Islands, and took approximately 350 Japanese thence to Kuching.

## VII

While the preliminaries to the Kuching surrender were progressing, that of the Muschu and Kairiru Islands off Wewak was effected on 10th September, a prelude to the surrender of the *XVIII Army* by General Adachi three days later. In the opening gambits of the New Guinea surrender the R.A.N. played a part with *ML805* (Lieutenant Sturt<sup>9</sup>) and *ML809* (Lieutenant Holm<sup>1</sup>). Late in July the 6th Division's Intelligence staff received information suggesting that, with prompting, the Japanese on Muschu might be induced to surrender. On 1st August *ML805* fitted with broadcasting gear and supported by *ML809*—for it was known that the island was heavily fortified—stood close in at dusk off various Japanese encampments, and broadcast news and invitations to surrender. These broadcasts were continued almost nightly. They were apparently fruitless until the Japanese surrender on 15th August. On the 17th, the two M.L.'s with white flags flying from the mastheads, broadcast the facts of the surrender and called on the Japanese to come down to the beach.

Approximately fifteen minutes passed when suddenly there was the cry: “There they are”; and through the trees stepped a small party of Japanese carrying a white flag. *ML805*'s dinghy was lowered and Army Intelligence officers, with an interpreter, were rowed ashore and a conference took place on the beach. This was the first personal contact made between any Allied and Japanese forces in the South-West Pacific area.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of this meeting, Rear-Admiral Sato, commanding the Japanese forces on the two islands, who was in wireless communication with General Adachi, became the personal link between Allied and Japanese commands in the New Guinea area. On 10th September Admiral Sato, on board *ML805* in Kairiru Strait, surrendered the Japanese forces on Kairiru and Muschu Islands to Major-General Robertson,<sup>3</sup> commanding the 6th Division, and handed over his sword. Three days later, at 10 a.m. on 13th September, on Wom airstrip, Wewak, General Adachi signed the surrender and handed over his sword in the presence of 3,000 troops of the 6th Division, and a naval detachment. The wardroom table of *ML805*, on which Admiral Sato signed on 10th September, was again used at Cape Wom on the 13th.

<sup>9</sup> Lt E. H. W. Sturt; RANVR. *ML815*; comd *ML805* 1943-46. Of Sydney; b. Fiji, 30 Oct 1909.

<sup>1</sup> Lt I. Holm; RANVR. *ML431*; comd *ML809* 1943-46. Of Sandgate, Qld; b. Brisbane, 6 May 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Fairmiles in the Wewak Campaign, a paper by Sub-Lt T. F. Hogg, RANR, and Sub-Lt J. L. Smart, RANR.

<sup>3</sup> Lt-Gen Sir Horace Robertson, KBE, DSO. Comd 19 Bde 1940-41; GOC 1 Cav Div 1942, 1 Armd Div 1942-43, Western Comd 1944-45, 5 and 6 Divs 1945; comd BCOF, Japan 1946-51. Regular soldier; b. Warrnambool, Vic, 29 Oct 1894. Died 28 Apr 1960.

## VIII

On 12th September Admiral Mountbatten took the surrender of Lieut-General Seishiro Itagaki, as delegate of Field Marshal Count Terauchi who was ill, at Singapore. Among other things, this surrender led to the uncovering of the final chapter of the story of the JAYWICK and RIMAU operations, the Allied raids on Singapore described earlier in this volume.

As stated, the last that had been known of the RIMAU party was evidence of their having been on Merapas Island, in the Rhio Archipelago, in November 1944. They were to have been picked up there, subsequent to their attacks on ships at Singapore, by an Allied submarine at any time within a month from 8th November. On 22nd November an inspection of the island was carried out from the British submarine *Tantalus*. There was no sign of the RIMAU party, but evidence on shore suggested that all its members had been there and had left, apparently in a hurry, at least fourteen days previously.

On 3rd September, as mentioned, H.M.S. *Cleopatra*, flag of Admiral Power, entered Singapore Harbour and next day the 5th Indian Division landed there. In the first volume of this naval series of the history it was told how, during the British exodus from Singapore in the days immediately prior to the surrender on 15th February 1942, the native ruler of the Rhio Archipelago, the Malay Chieftain, Amir Silalahi, was instrumental in saving nearly a thousand survivors, men, women and children, and transporting them to safety via Sumatra.<sup>4</sup> When the Japanese took over, Silalahi was deposed, and detained on Singkep Island in the Lingga Archipelago. Thence he escaped in September 1945, and arrived at Singapore a few days after the return there of the British. To the unit which had been detailed to War Crimes, he told of the imprisonment on Singkep Island in December 1944 of the survivors of the RIMAU party, who had been captured in the Lingga Archipelago and who were later taken to Singapore. From this clue the fate of the RIMAU party was unravelled.

On 6th October 1944 the members of the RIMAU party were in the captured junk *Mustika* at Pulau Sambu, just outside Singapore Harbour, ready to strike. The approach of a police launch forced them to open fire. Surprise thus being lost, Lieut-Colonel Lyon abandoned the operation, and gave orders to withdraw independently to Merapas in four small parties in rubber boats. The Japanese encountered Lyon's party on Sole Island, and in a night action Lyon and one other officer were killed, after killing the Japanese commander and killing and wounding several more. The remainder of the party reached Merapas and there joined up with the three other parties also depleted by casualties.

On Merapas they were discovered by the Japanese on 4th November. They at first repulsed their enemies with heavy loss, but later were compelled to leave Merapas. They fought their way south from island to

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<sup>4</sup> *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, p. 579.

island, until twelve had been killed or died and eleven had been taken prisoner. Of these, an Able Seaman died shortly after capture. The others, of whom Major R. N. Ingleton, Royal Marines, was now the senior officer, after a period in Singkep police station, were taken to Singapore. Here, on 7th July 1945, two days after being sentenced to death by a military court, they were beheaded in the execution ground off Reformatory Road. All records of the Japanese Military Court, of the Judiciary Department and of translations of interrogations of Japanese and Korean witnesses, testify to the "patriotism, fearless enterprise, heroic behaviour, and sublime end of all members of this party".<sup>5</sup>

There is evidence that the Japanese were anxious to avoid the death sentence. It was in fact suggested to the prisoners before their trial that they should adopt a humble attitude and plead for mercy. Instead, down to the last corporal and able seaman they remained resolute and defiant to the last. A young Australian captain [R. C. Page], who had accompanied Lyon on his earlier expedition also, was asked by the court, "Did you yourself kill any Japanese soldiers?" He replied in clear and deliberate tones: "I am an officer in the British army, and I know that my aim was good." Not one of them can have dreamt that a single word of his conduct or his fate would ever be known in England or Australia. What, then, was the secret of this cheerful endurance in captivity and of the light-hearted courage with which they met their end?<sup>6</sup>

On the day that Mountbatten took the surrender of Itagaki at Singapore, H.M.A.S. *Hawkesbury* (Lieut-Commander Purvis) entered the port, escorting the interstate liner *Duntroon*, carrying troops to garrison Singapore and hospital accommodation for rescued prisoners of war. Signalman Thomson<sup>7</sup> who was in *Hawkesbury* at the time, wrote a description of which the following is an excerpt:

The two ships entered Singapore Straits as the "Voice of Singapore" radio was broadcasting Lord Louis Mountbatten's acceptance of the Official Japanese surrender—September 12, 1945. The ships saluted the Flagship of the British Far Eastern Fleet—the battleship *Nelson*—as they entered Singapore. Overhead, planes of the R.A.F. roared and did "Victory Rolls". Later, ships in port—including the French battleship *Richelieu*—fired a victory salute. H.M.A.S. *Hawkesbury* was thus the first Australian warship to visit Singapore since ships of the R.A.N. were among the last out prior to the Japanese occupation. . . . The main troop convoy of 8th Division prisoners of war consisted of the liner *Duntroon* and the British troopship *Arawa*. They were escorted by *Hawkesbury*. The departure scene was very touching. While *Arawa* cleared the wharf, *Hawkesbury* circled the troop-laden *Duntroon*, lying just off. Every vantage point on *Duntroon* was crowded. "Homeward Bound" was played over *Hawkesbury*'s amplifying system, and she flew an outside Australian blue ensign from the masthead. Then, with *Hawkesbury* leading *Duntroon* and *Arawa* in line ahead, the British *City of Worcester* [5,469 tons] joined the

<sup>5</sup> From a report by Major-General Ohtsuka of the *Seventh Area Army*.

<sup>6</sup> From "Expedition to Singkep", by Colonel C. H. D. Wild, in *Blackwood's Magazine*, October 1946, which is the source of this story of the fate of the RIMAU party. The ten men who, after being held prisoners at Singkep were later taken to Singapore and executed, were Major R. N. Ingleton, Captain R. C. Page, Lieutenant W. G. Carey, Warrant-Officer A. Warren, Sergeant D. P. Gooley, Corporal C. M. Stewart, Corporal R. B. Fletcher, Lance-Corporal J. T. Hardy, Able Seaman W. G. Falls and Able Seaman F. W. L. Marsh. (These names are from R. McKie, *The Heroes*, pp. 241-2.)

<sup>7</sup> Sig H. M. Thomson, PM4698. *ML817, ML809, HMAS Hawkesbury*. Journalist; of Melbourne; b. Bendigo, Vic, 15 Sep 1924.

convoy temporarily for safe passage through the minefields. As the Singapore skyline began to fade, with all its memories for those 8th Divvy chaps, Commander Purvis sent by lamp to the officer commanding troops in *Duntroon*, the signal: "For all ex-prisoners of war. And so we say farewell to this shining jewel of the Orient, famed for its luxury, good-living, music, and beautiful women. Onward to Aussie, land of the blessed." It was signed "Captain, Officers, and Crew of H.M.A.S. *Hawkesbury*." Back from *Duntroon* came the reply: "The boys appreciate your message. The little Chinese girls in their immaculate slacks will remain always in their memories, as will the kindness of the Chinese to the prisoners." . . . At 1825 local time, on 30th September, *Hawkesbury* made the following signal by light to *Duntroon* and *Arawa*: "Australia in sight on our port bow."

## IX

At 11 a.m. on 7th September 1945 H.M.A.S. *Moresby* (Lieut-Com-mander Gale) left Darwin on operation TOFO, the ceremony of surrender of all Japanese forces in Timor. *Moresby* had on board the Senior Naval Officer of the operation, Commander Cant, and Brigadier Dyke,<sup>8</sup> who had been delegated by Blamey to accept the surrender of the commander of the Japanese forces in Timor or controlled from Timor. *Moresby*, which had been on survey work out of Darwin, had in company H.M.A. Ships *Horsham*, *Benalla*, *Echuca*, *Parkes* and *Katoomba*—these four last-named each towing two landing craft—*Kangaroo*, *Bombo* and H.D.M.L's 1322, 1324 and 1329. Also in the convoy were the Dutch minesweeper *Abraham Crijnssen* (525 tons) and transport *Van den Bosch* (2,354 tons). At 7 p.m. on the 9th H.M.A. Ships *Warrnambool* and *Gladstone* joined the convoy.

At 8 a.m. on 11th September the convoy arrived at the appointed rendezvous in latitude 10 degrees 3 minutes south, 123 degrees 27 minutes east, off Koepang, and two Japanese officers boarded *Moresby* for interrogation regarding minefields and underwater obstructions. On completion of the interrogation the convoy entered harbour in single line ahead, with *Abraham Crijnssen* sweeping ahead of the line and ships at action stations. At 10.30 a.m. *Moresby* anchored off Koepang, with the other ships anchoring nearby.

At 11.50 a.m. the Japanese army and navy commanders boarded *Moresby*, and were taken to the quarterdeck, where the stage was set for the surrender ceremony. Assembled there were the commanding officers of the ships of the convoy, army staff officers, *Moresby*'s officers, and press correspondents. At noon on the 11th, the Japanese army commander, Colonel Kaida, signed the instrument of surrender of all Japanese forces in Timor, a total of 3,235 men, and this was accepted by Brigadier Dyke. A naval beach party landed, and this was followed by Brigadier Dyke and the Army Reconnaissance party and the R.A.N. Port Directorate. Disembarkation of troops and supplies was carried out next day and on the 13th Dyke established headquarters on shore. On 14th September *Benalla*, *Horsham* and *Echuca* departed for Darwin, and thence to carry

<sup>8</sup> Maj-Gen L. G. H. Dyke, CBE, DSO. CO 2/3 Fd Regt 1941-42; CCRA II Corps 1943-44, I Corps 1944-45; comd Timor Force 1945-46. Regular soldier; b. Adelaide, 6 Aug 1900.

out surveying operations north-west of Dundas Strait; two days later *Moresby* also left Koepang for Darwin, and to resume survey operations.

Colonel Kaida's surrender in *Moresby* on 11th September included that of about 150 Japanese on guard and police duties in Portuguese Timor. Dyke was now directed by the Australian Government to go to Dili, inform the Portuguese Governor of the surrender of the Japanese forces, and arrange with him for the landing of a party to ensure that the surrender in Portuguese Timor was effective. To act as his political adviser, Mr W. D. Forsyth of the Department of External Affairs was flown to Timor. He was accompanied by Mr Manderson. On 22nd September *Warrnambool*, with Dyke and Forsyth on board, and with *Parkes*, *Gladstone* and *Katoomba* in company, sailed from Koepang for Dili; there they were joined early on 24th September by *Moresby*, recalled from her survey plans to assume duty as senior H.M.A. Ship in the area. That day Dyke called on the Governor of Portuguese Timor and formally apprised him of the Japanese surrender. That evening an officer and ten ratings from each of the Australian ships were landed and attended a thanksgiving ceremony at the Portuguese flag-staff. On 27th September the Portuguese sloops *Bartolomeu Dias*<sup>9</sup> and *Goncalves Zarco*<sup>1</sup> arrived, and were officially visited by Brigadier Dyke and Commander Gale. The Portuguese ship *Angola* (7,884 tons), with troops, arrived at Dili on the 29th. The Australian ships left Dili at intervals, the last to go being *Moresby* which, acting as Headquarters Ship for Brigadier Dyke, left at 9 p.m. on 1st October.

On the 3rd *Moresby* anchored off Koepang at 7 a.m., and Brigadier Dyke and staff disembarked and returned to Timforce headquarters at Koepang. At 3 o'clock that afternoon, Gale, as Senior Naval Officer present, attended the surrender to Brigadier Dyke of the *48th Japanese Division* by Lieut-General Yamada. A naval detachment of approximately 90 ratings, formed from H.M.A. Ships present—*Hawkesbury*, *Gympie*, *Katoomba*, *Gladstone* and *Moresby*—was landed for the occasion. The next morning *Moresby* sailed for Darwin and the resumption of survey work.

## X

On 17th August, when the Japanese surrender arrangements were announced, the British Government proposed to the Australian Government that it be suggested to the United States that the Japanese on Nauru and Ocean Islands should surrender to a British commander, although they were in the American Pacific Fleet area. The American Chiefs of Staff agreed that Australian forces might accept the surrender of the two forces, comprising 3,200 Japanese and 500 Koreans on Nauru, and 500 Japanese on Ocean Island. Arrangements were made accordingly.

On 8th September H.M.A.S. *Diamantina* was in Torokina, where she had taken General Kanda for the surrender of Bougainville, and she now filled the naval role in the Nauru and Ocean Islands operation, with

<sup>9</sup> *Bartolomeu Dias*, Portuguese sloop, 1,788 tons, four 4.7-in guns, 21 kts.

<sup>1</sup> *Goncalves Zarco*, Portuguese sloop, 950 tons, three 4.7-in guns, 16½ kts.

Rose, her commanding officer, Senior Naval Officer present. On the 9th, Brigadier Stevenson,<sup>2</sup> Senior Military Officer of the expedition, boarded with his staff, war correspondents and photographers, and that evening *Diamantina* sailed from Torokina escorting a convoy of two merchant ships, *River Burdekin* (5,108 tons) and *River Glenelg* (4,914 tons). With the expedition were Sir Albert Ellis and Commander Phipps,<sup>3</sup> representing the New Zealand Government, and Mr M. Ridgway of the Nauru Administration. It had been decided to remove the Japanese from the islands, and the merchant ships carried a military force under Lieut-Colonel Kelly<sup>4</sup> to conduct the Japanese to the ships and guard them on the voyage back to Bougainville, where they were to be confined.

The voyage of four days to Nauru was brightened by a Naval Board signal cancelling blackout restrictions, "an order", remarked Rose in his Report of Proceedings, "which was obeyed in a spirit of the utmost willingness and gratitude". *Diamantina* proceeded ahead of the convoy on the 12th, and reached Nauru at 7 a.m. on 13th September. The Government launch *Kia Kia*, with Colonel V. Fox-Strangways, Resident Commissioner of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands on board, was already there. At 7.30 a.m. a Japanese envoy, a naval officer, boarded *Diamantina* for preliminary questioning, and to learn the arrangements for the surrender later in the day.

At 2.45 p.m. on 13th September the Japanese surrender party, comprising naval Captain Hisayuki Soeda and five other naval officers, boarded *Diamantina*. Captain Soeda surrendered his sword to Brigadier Stevenson, and signed the Instrument of Surrender. At 2 p.m. on the 14th a naval guard of two officers and 30 men from *Diamantina* participated with a military guard in the ceremony of rehoisting the Union Flag on the island. The ceremony was attended by representatives of all Services, and the official visitors mentioned above. Discharging of cargo from the two merchant ships continued over the next two days; a naval W/T station was established on shore, and at 4 p.m. on the 16th Lieutenant Lever commenced functioning as Port Director, Nauru. The two merchant ships completed discharging, and then embarked Japanese prisoners and sailed for Bougainville. "The operation having thus been concluded satisfactorily", *Diamantina* departed from Nauru at 5.45 p.m. on 16th September, and arrived at Torokina three days later.

The surrender of Ocean Island took place on 1st October. *Diamantina*, with Brigadier Stevenson and staff on board, arrived close off shore there at 8 a.m. on 30th September, and was boarded by two Japanese envoys. As at Nauru, H.M.S. *Kia Kia* was present, and *River Burdekin* arrived next morning. Soon after 9 a.m. on 1st October the Japanese commander

<sup>2</sup> Maj-Gen J. R. Stevenson, CBE, DSO, ED. CO 2/3 Bn 1941-43; comd 11 Bde 1943-45 and Merauke Force 1943-44. Parliamentary officer; of Lakemba, NSW; b. Bondi, NSW, 7 Oct 1908.

<sup>3</sup> Rear-Adm Sir Peter Phipps, KBE, DSC, VRD; RNZNVR, later RNZN. Comd HMS *Bay* 1940-41; HMNZS's *Scarba* 1941-42, *Moa* 1943, *Matai* and *Arabis* (and Senior Officer 25 Minesweeping Flotilla) 1944-45. Chief of NZ Naval Staff 1960-63, Defence Staff 1963-65. Bank officer; b. Milton, NZ, 7 Jun 1909.

<sup>4</sup> Lt-Col J. L. A. Kelly, DSO. 2/13 Bn; CO 31/51 Bn 1944-45. Regular soldier; b. Cowra, NSW, 10 Mar 1907.



of Ocean Island, Lieut-Commander Suzuki, with three of his officers, boarded *Diamantina* and the surrender, to Brigadier Stevenson, took place on the ship's quarterdeck. The Australian, British, and New Zealand officials at the ceremony were the same as at Nauru. At 3 o'clock that afternoon, with guards of honour provided by *Diamantina*, the Army, and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Native Constabulary ex *Kia Kia*, the Union Flag was hoisted on a mast erected on the spot where the Union Flag was first hoisted on Ocean Island in 1901. Lieutenant Robson<sup>5</sup> took over as Port Director in the British Phosphate Commission offices at noon on 2nd October. And on that day *River Burdekin* completed discharging, embarked the Japanese prisoners—all naval personnel excepting a few civilians—and sailed for Torokina; and, there being no further duties for *Diamantina*, that ship also sailed.

## XI

On 17th December 1941 the Dutch merchant ships *Both*, *Valentijn* and *Patras*, escorted by H.M.A. Ships *Adelaide* and *Ballarat*, arrived at Ambon from Darwin, carrying the 1,090 soldiers of "Gull Force". There was some small reinforcement from Australia during January 1942. But at the end of that month the Japanese attacked the island of Ambon in force, and on 2nd February the survivors of the Allied garrison surrendered to the invaders, except for some small groups who made their way back to Australia.

As soon as fighting ceased, with the Japanese surrender in August 1945, an attempt was made to obtain the immediate release of Allied prisoners of war believed to be in Ambon. Six ships, the frigates *Burdekin* and *Barcoo* and the corvettes *Bundaberg*, *Cootamundra* (Lieut-Commander Hull), *Latrobe* (Lieutenant W. A. Smith) and *Inverell*, were detailed by N.O.I.C. Moluccas, Captain Walsh, for operation RECOVERY. Commander Donovan, Deputy N.O.I.C. Moluccas, was in operational command in *Bundaberg*, in which ship he embarked at Morotai on 13th August. Also on board for the operation were Lieut-Colonel Williams,<sup>6</sup> A.I.F., representing the Commander-in-Chief, who was to handle proceedings on shore after contact had been established with the Japanese commander, and two A.T.I.S. interpreters. Donovan's mission was to attempt to contact the Japanese commander at Ambon with a view to obtaining the immediate handing over of some 800 British and Australian prisoners of war. He was not to accept the surrender of Ambon. And he was to do nothing that might prejudice the safety of the prisoners in Japanese hands.

*Bundaberg* sailed from Morotai on the 13th, and made rendezvous with the other five ships in the operation on the morning of 16th August off Ambon. These five patrolled off the island while awaiting the result of *Bundaberg's* attempts to establish contact with the Japanese. *Bundaberg*

<sup>5</sup> Lt L. Robson; RANR. HMAS's *Westralia* and *Warrego*; comd HMAS *Glenelg* 1944-45. Merchant seaman; b. Dipton, England, 3 Aug 1908.

<sup>6</sup> Lt-Col T. E. Williams, OBE, ED. Comd 9 Aust Armd Regt 1942-43; GSO1(Ops) NT Force 1943-44; GSO1 Australian Eighth Army 1944-45; GSO1(Ops) Adv LHQ 1945. B. 7 Jul 1903.

entered the harbour at 11.55 a.m. She flew a white flag. She was at action stations, but not obviously, with guns left in an apparently secured position. Donovan's instructions to his officers, made in the interests of the prisoners in Japanese hands, were that "if we were fired on we should increase to full speed and turn and get out but that we should not fire back except if it appeared that the ship might be taken".

We commenced flashing signals at everything and anything that looked as if it might hold a signal station. . . . No reply to any flashing signals was received. . . . All was still and silent as we went up harbour.

At 12.35 *Bundaberg* was stopped by a flashing and flag signal. Engines were stopped but not put astern; "and as she lost way and flag signalling commenced, the ship was kept moving slowly through the water turning under the outside screw and full wheel".<sup>7</sup> Flag signals were then exchanged, over a period of one and a half hours; but the Japanese refused to have any intercourse with the ship, and asked *Bundaberg* to "Please go out of harbour quickly".<sup>8</sup> Since it was apparent that nothing would be achieved that day, Donovan took *Bundaberg* out of harbour, and at 5.15 p.m. effected rendezvous with *Barcoo* and *Burdekin* 15 miles south-west of the island. He intended to try again next day, and signalled Walsh accordingly. But later that night, after consultation with Colonel Williams, who had discussed the matter with the interpreters and, as a result, was concerned at possible harm to the prisoners should *Bundaberg* re-enter the harbour on the morrow, Donovan decided to delay re-entry until "the whole circumstances had been referred to the Commander-in-Chief". Next day a signal was received from Walsh cancelling the operation, and the six ships retired to Australia.

Donovan, in his report of the episode, remarked that "the bearing and steadiness of *Bundaberg's* ship's company in somewhat stressing circumstances were a credit to the officers". Colonel Williams, in his report to the Army Chief of Staff, remarked:

While the operation did not result in the release of the POW this does not detract from the splendid manner in which the mission was carried out by the captain and crew of H.M.A.S. *Bundaberg*. I would like to make special mention of Commander J. Donovan, R.A.N., who was responsible for the conduct of the operation. It is considered that he carried out his task in a most commendable manner and displayed courage and resolution under difficult circumstances.

After the surrenders of the senior commanders had taken place in the first days of September, the situation at Ambon became favourable for the recovery of the prisoners of war. On 8th September radio contact was established between Advanced L.H.Q., Morotai, and the remnants of Gull Force and, in cooperation with Advanced Land Headquarters, N.O.I.C

<sup>7</sup> Commander Jack Donovan, Report on the Recent Ambon Operation.

<sup>8</sup> The signals exchanged between Japanese headquarters signal station Ambon and *Bundaberg* were—*Bundaberg's* signals in parenthesis:

"You should stop your vessel instantly"; ("Please send Naval officer"); "What are you going to do"; ("Peaceful. Please send naval officer"); "I cannot receive your offer. Please go out of harbour quickly"; ("May I send liaison officer"); "I have no intention together speak"; ("Thank you.").

Moluccas arranged for ships to be dispatched to Ambon to convey the Allied prisoners of war thence to Morotai.

H.M.A. Ships *Glenelg* (Lieut-Commander Whitebrook,<sup>9</sup> S.O.), *Cootamundra*, *Latrobe* and *June* (Lieutenant Sangster<sup>1</sup>) sailed from Morotai at 8 p.m. on 8th September.

The force reached the rendezvous position, five miles off Tanjong Nusanive, the south-western extremity of Ambon, at 11.30 a.m. on the 10th, and radio communication was established with Major Westley,<sup>2</sup> commanding officer of Gull Force. At 11.55 a.m. Lieutenant Nishida of the *21st Naval Guard Unit* boarded *Glenelg* from a barge wearing the Japanese ensign and a white flag, and the force entered harbour and berthed alongside the main jetty where all the prisoners of war were waiting. Embarkation proceeded immediately contact had been made with Major Westley and Japanese officials. *Latrobe*, after embarking 20 walking cases, was detached to Piru Bay, Ceram, to embark two officers and 23 other ranks of the Indian Army who had been reported by Major Westley. The other three ships left Ambon at 5.45 p.m. on the 10th. "While passing Tanjong Nusanive," Whitebrook noted in his report to N.O.I.C. Moluccas, "the 'Still' was sounded and colours half-masted as a tribute to those of Gull Force who had died in captivity." The force arrived at Morotai in the morning of 12th September.

A total of 164 prisoners of war was brought out in the ships from Ambon. They comprised 123 Australians, nine Americans, seven Dutch, and 25 Indians from Ceram. N.O.I.C. Moluccas, in his report to the Naval Board, remarked:

Of the total of 164, 70 officers and men, including 38 stretcher cases, needed medical attention. The remainder were fit for normal travel, all were extremely emaciated, some men of twelve stone normal weight weighing only five stone. The 123 Australians were all that remained of the original Gull Force of 800, the remainder having either been beheaded or died from malnutrition and disease. One A.I.F. other rank died the day following arrival at Morotai.

The Japanese commander at Ambon was prepared to surrender to Whitebrook, but this was not accepted, since it was impossible to land an occupation party of a reasonable size. Occupation was carried out on 22nd September. The naval force consisted of *Glenelg* (S.O.), *Cootamundra*, *Rockhampton* (Lieut-Commander Dwyer<sup>3</sup>), *June* and *Latrobe*, and *Birchgrove Park* (640 tons), *Anaconda* (238), *Krait*, *Three Cheers*, *Nyanie*, *Westralia* and *Poyang*. The occupation force comprised the 33rd Australian Infantry Brigade of 2,705 officers and men, with Brigadier Steele<sup>4</sup> in command.

<sup>9</sup> Lt-Cdr H. G. Whitebrook; RANR. HMAS *Benalla*; comd HMAS's *Kookaburra* 1939-40, *Heros* 1941-42, *Stella* 1944, *Glenelg* 1945-46. Of Sydney; b. Sydney, 10 Dec 1907.

<sup>1</sup> Lt-Cdr G. C. Sangster; RANVR. HMAS's *Bingera* and *Mildura*; comd HMAS *June* 1945-46. Department manager; of Adelaide; b. Burra, SA, 21 Dec 1905.

<sup>2</sup> Maj G. de V. Westley, ED; 2/21 Bn. Estate agent; of Balwyn, Vic; b. Hawthorn, Vic, 14 Apr 1910.

<sup>3</sup> Lt-Cdr H. K. Dwyer; RANVR. HMAS *Bathurst*; comd HMAS's *Warrnambool* 1943-44, *Rockhampton* 1945-46. Of Sydney; b. Brisbane, 14 Jun 1907.

<sup>4</sup> Maj-Gen W. A. B. Steele, CBE. Comd 1 Motor Div 1942, 3 Armd Div 1942-43; DQMG LHQ 1944-45; comd 33 Bde 1945. Regular soldier; b. Gympie, Qld, 4 Feb 1895. Died 20 Jan 1966.

*Glenelg*, with an advanced party of 110 A.M.F., arrived at Ambon at 8 a.m. on 22nd September, and occupation proceeded without difficulty. Whitebrook assumed duties as Port Director. The remaining ships, carrying A.M.F. troops and stores, arrived in follow-up convoys which reached Ambon on 23rd and 27th September.

The formalities on the first day were smoothly performed. The Ambonese welcomed *Glenelg*, the Australian and Dutch flags were hoisted at the control tower of the wharf, and at 10 a.m. Vice-Admiral Ichise, commanding the naval base, and Major-General Kobori, commanding the 5th Division, reported and were given instructions. Next day the convoy arrived and the troops disembarked. That afternoon General Blamey's proclamation was read in the presence of an assembly of Ambonese, and a bamboo-flute band performed. The follow-up force arrived on 27th September.<sup>5</sup>

## XII

In the meantime, ships of the R.A.N. were employed in other occupation and recovery of prisoners of war and internees operations. At 7.45 a.m. on 1st September *Barcoo* sailed from Morotai for nearby Mili Island, where she arrived at 10.5 a.m. and embarked 153 Indian prisoners of war. The majority of them were in a bad state caused by malnutrition and ill-treatment. P.T. boats subsequently brought out about 400 more.

In between her two Ambon operations *Glenelg*, as Senior Officer, with *Rockhampton*, *Bowen*, *Junee* and *Latrobe*, arrived at Menado on 14th September with an A.M.F. and N.I.C.A. Contact Team, and transported 334 internees—of whom 110 were women and 145 children—thence to Morotai. The operation was completed on 16th September. All those brought out from Menado were suffering badly from malnutrition. N.O.I.C. Moluccas, in his report, remarked: "The crews of H.M.A. Ships performed most admirably, and turned over their mess decks completely to the women and children. Very few of the crew had any sleep whatsoever. In addition they mothered the women and children who were very seasick."

During the first three days of September H.M.A.S. *Swan* (Lieutenant Dovers) completed an annual refit in Brisbane. She left the Queensland port on 6th September, and on the 11th arrived at Jacquinot Bay. From 12th to 17th September *Swan* was at anchor at Rabaul, carrying out the duties of W/T Guard Ship until the Shore W/T Station was established on that last mentioned date. The next day Major-General Eather,<sup>6</sup> G.O.C. 11th Australian Division, and staff joined the ship, and she sailed for New Ireland to accept the surrender of the Japanese forces there.

*Swan* anchored in Nabuto Bay, Namatanai, at 7.10 a.m. on 19th September. Two white flags were observed on the beach, and at 8 a.m. Lieut-General Ito, Commander-in-Chief of Japanese forces in New Ireland, boarded from a barge with his staff of four officers and a German civilian internee. General Eather read the terms of surrender as accepted by

<sup>5</sup> Long, *The Final Campaigns*, p. 571.

<sup>6</sup> Maj-Gen K. W. Eather, CB, CBE, DSO, ED. CO 2/1 Bn 1939-41; comd 25 Bde 1941-45; GOC 11 Div 1945-46. Dental mechanic; of Bankstown, NSW; b. Sydney, 6 Jun 1901.

General Imamura, and General Ito and his staff handed their swords to General Eather in token of surrender.

*Swan* weighed at 8.25 a.m. and proceeded to Fangalawa Bay, on the north-east coast of New Ireland, where she anchored at 3.5 p.m. Here Lieut-Colonel Nyman,<sup>7</sup> of General Eather's staff, went ashore with a landing party and represented General Eather at the presentation of the directive surrender terms to Rear-Admiral Tamura, Commander of Japanese forces in the area. The admiral and his staff surrendered their swords. One Lutheran priest and five nuns were handed over to the landing party and, when brought aboard *Swan*, were found to be extremely emaciated, with the priest suffering from beriberi. *Swan* weighed at 5.28 p.m. and proceeded to Rabaul.

While *Glenelg* was engaged with her companions in the Menado operation, other groups of H.M.A. Ships were employed in the occupation of Macassar and Bandjermasin by troops of the 7th Division A.I.F. *Barcoo* left Morotai in the afternoon of 13th September, and at Balikpapan on the 20th embarked Brigadier Dougherty<sup>8</sup> and units of the 21st Brigade. On the 21st she arrived off the entrance to Macassar, and there made rendezvous with H.M.A. Ships *Inverell*, *Grass Snake* and *Alatna*, and H.M.S. *Eduardo*; and the group entered Macassar and secured alongside. Next day the ships disembarked an advance occupation force of 250. A feature of the arrival alongside of the ships was a guard formed by Royal Navy prisoners of war, survivors of *Exeter*, *Stronghold* and *Encounter*. They numbered 460, "approximately 200 having died as the result of beatings, disease, and malnutrition".<sup>9</sup>

A Port Directorate was established in *Inverell*, with that ship's commanding officer as Port Director. On 23rd September H.M.S. *Maidstone* arrived off Macassar to lift British prisoners. Their immediate removal was desirable owing to strong anti-Dutch feeling, and *Barcoo* and *Inverell* ferried them out to *Maidstone*, which was anchored some seven miles from the wharf. *Maidstone* left Macassar in the afternoon of the 24th "amid great scenes of enthusiasm and joy". *Burdekin* and *Gascoyne* also joined the group at Macassar, and with *Eduardo* and *Grass Snake* built up the occupation force and transported stores; *Warrego* arrived before the end of the month to survey, buoy and mark the channel.

Occupation of Bandjermasin commenced on 15th September when *Burdekin*, *Gascoyne*, *HDML1359* and L.C.T's arrived there with an occupation force; officers and men of the 2/31st Battalion were carried in the two frigates. *Barcoo*, with L.C.T's, arrived on 30th September with additional elements of the occupation force. By the end of the month the ships had evacuated to Balikpapan 66 Indian prisoners of war, and 3,300 Japanese.

<sup>7</sup> Lt-Col A. L. Nyman. GSO1(Ops) HQ Second Army 1943-44, NT Force 1944-45; GSO1 HQ 11 Div 1945-46. Regular soldier; b. 23 Jun 1906.

<sup>8</sup> Maj-Gen I. N. Dougherty, CBE, DSO, ED. CO 2/4 Bn 1940-42; comd 23 Bde 1942, 21 Bde 1942-45. Schoolteacher; of Armidale, NSW; b. Leadville, NSW, 6 Apr 1907.

<sup>9</sup> N.O.I.C. Moluccas, Report of Activities, September 1945.

In the final pages of the British naval history of the Second World War appears the following paragraph:

On the 27th August, when Admiral Rawlings' flagship anchored at the entrance to Tokyo Bay the snow-capped cone of Fujiyama, the sacred mountain of Japan, stood out exceptionally clearly against the western sky; and, as evening drew on, the watchers on the quarterdeck of the *King George V* saw the red orb of the sun go down right into the middle of the volcano's crater. Rarely, if ever, can a heavenly body have appeared to act with such appropriate symbolism.<sup>1</sup>

The phenomenon was remarked upon by others, including observers in the Australian ships with the contingent of the British Pacific Fleet. Throughout the following month, as briefly discussed above, ships of the Royal Australian Navy were employed in the afterglow of that symbolic sunset in the successive surrender ceremonies that marked the official ending of the Second World War.

The end of September saw the conclusion of this phase; but did not mark the end of the tasks of the smaller ships of the R.A.N. There yet remained the clearing of mines, and of obstructions from harbours in the re-occupied territories; the succouring of those who had been prisoners of the Japanese; the maintenance of order; and, in the Netherlands East Indies, the naval part in the settling of difficulties arising from the emergence of Indonesia as an independent nation. It was the clearing of the fields of our own sowing which was the most protracted task, and the sweeping of Australia's defensive minefields went on for more than twelve months after the cessation of hostilities. But it was that August setting of the sun into Fujiyama's crater that marked the end of the Navy's main task, the successful carrying through of which put the symbolism into that historic event.

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<sup>1</sup> Roskill, *The War At Sea*, Vol III, Part II, p. 379.

## CHAPTER 29

### EPILOGUE

SO ended the war of 1939-45. The Admiralty's "Cease Hostilities" signal wrote finis to a story in which the Royal Australian Navy, together with its progenitor, the Royal Navy, and the other navies of the British Commonwealth, had been an active participant since its first words were written on the night of 3rd September 1939, with the receipt in Navy Office, Melbourne, of the Admiralty signal: "Commence hostilities at once with Germany."

The triumphant result for the Allies was due to their exercise of sea power. By this the western Axis partners were confined in "Fortress Europe", and Japan was penned within her "Co-Prosperity Sphere" in the western Pacific and its archipelagos of islands. This realisation was forced upon Germany before the war had run half its course. In November 1943 the German newspaper *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger* published an article in which was written:

If today we coldly and realistically view the naval war situation and everything connected with it, we see even more clearly than last year its outstanding position in this world-wide struggle. We realise that besides the eastern front there is no front of operations or preparedness in this war which is not either dependent on, or affected by, sea power. . . . For millions of Germans who in this war, after victories on the Continent, stood on the coasts of Europe with no possibility of carrying their victorious onslaught forward beyond these coasts, it is a profound realisation affecting their attitude to the future.

When he wrote "there is no front of operations or preparedness in this war which is not either dependent on, or affected by, sea power", the writer of the German newspaper article could have added, with truth, "as in the 1914-18 war, the Napoleonic wars, the Elizabethan wars, the Punic wars, the Graeco-Persian wars, and every major war in history".

The Second World War showed that the words of the early British King, Offa of Mercia: "He who would be secure on land must be supreme at sea", had lost nothing of their truth in the 1,200 years which had elapsed since they were first uttered. For the sea, covering three-fifths of the Earth's surface, encircles the land masses. He who controls the sea controls the communications between continents and islands, and is free to move about the Earth; to transport his armies where he wishes; to strike suddenly when he will; to pen his adversaries into areas which he can make even more restricted as he brings his pressure to bear, to which he can increasingly deny the sinews of war as he tightens his blockade. And his adversaries, though initially triumphant on land, "stand on the coasts with no possibility of carrying their victorious onslaught forward beyond those coasts". Moreover, as history has always shown, and as was again demonstrated in the Second World War, these land-locked enemies,

in the lack of their own naval strength, are unable to hold these coasts against a powerful amphibious attack. In the case of Japan, this exercise of sea power brought to surrender, without the defeat of its army, one of the strongest military powers.

The Second World War brought changes in naval tactics but none in the fundamentals of the exercise of sea power. The aircraft, as early as the First World War coming to be regarded by the Royal Navy as an integral part of its armament, was developed both as a menace to and adjunct of the surface ship. As a land-based weapon in narrow waters it extended the range of coastal artillery and gave it an added accuracy against enemy fleets, as exemplified in the Mediterranean by the German dive bombers in 1941. The attacks on the Mediterranean Fleet in January of that year drew from Admiral Cunningham the comment that the Fleet's "command of the Mediterranean was threatened by a weapon far more efficient and dangerous than any against which we had fought before".<sup>1</sup> As a ship-borne weapon, with the aircraft carrier as its launching platform, it greatly extended the bombardment range and weight of punch. The possibilities latent in this were first illustrated by the British in the successful naval air attack on Taranto in November 1940. Just over twelve months later they were further exploited by the Japanese at Pearl Harbour. A new concept was given to sea warfare, and the war saw a change as great as those which came with the first introduction of gunpowder in a ship's armament and the later advent of the explosive shell. The Battle of the Coral Sea, the first in which a naval action was fought and decided without the opposing surface ships coming in sight or gun range of each other, and the Battle of Midway shortly afterwards, heralded the eclipse of the battleship. And the Battle of Surigao Strait in October 1944 marked the end of an era in naval warfare. It was the last naval battle in which air power played no part, except in the pursuit. It was the last engagement of a battle line.

Thus, when *Mississippi* discharged her twelve 14-inch guns at *Yamashiro*, at a range of 19,790 yards, at 0408 October 25, 1944, she was not only giving that battleship the *coup de grâce*, but firing a funeral salute to a finished era of naval warfare. One can imagine the ghosts of all great admirals from Raleigh to Jellicoe standing at attention as Battle Line went into oblivion, along with the Greek phalanx, the Spanish wall of pikemen, the English longbow and the row-galley tactics of Salamis and Lepanto.<sup>2</sup>

And in the massed carrier-borne air attacks being delivered against the Japanese Home Islands right up to the moment of the Japanese surrender, were seen, and heard, and felt, something of the great changes which the Second World War brought to naval warfare. Even more significant were the further impending changes hinted at in the explosion of the nuclear bomb, with all its implications not only of explosive power but also of propulsive power in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> Morison, Vol XII, p. 241.



These were epoch making changes in the conduct of naval warfare. But they brought no change in sea power, of which the fighting instruments are but the material elements. There is no better definition of sea power than that of Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond in *Statesmen and Sea Power*:

That form of national strength which enables its possessor to send his armies and commerce across those stretches of sea and ocean which lie between his country or the country of his allies, and those territories to which he needs access in war; and to prevent his enemy from doing the same.

It was the possession of that form of national strength, and its correct use, which won the Second World War for the Allies. It was the insufficiency of that strength, its misuse, and—particularly in the case of Japan—failure to grasp the fundamentals of sea power, which lost the war for the Axis Powers. The Japanese made a number of errors. The cardinal one was their apparent assumption that they could fight a limited sea war. Thus they established their “Greater Co-Prosperity Sphere” with the aim of establishing a perimeter defensible against opposing sea power. But in an ocean war it is impossible to impose geographical limits. In the correct exercise of sea power the frontiers are the coastlines of the enemy. By establishing artificial limits, the Japanese left the greater part of the ocean roads to the enemy, allowing him to build up his strength and eventually to break the artificial barrier.

As Admiral Philip Colomb pointed out half a century earlier, “nothing can be done in the way of territorial attack with a disputed command of the sea”. In attempting to secure themselves within a geographical area of the Pacific, the Japanese grossly overstretched their capability and strained their lines of communication. In addition they fatally underestimated the resources and recuperative powers of their adversaries, while being over-complacent about their own. And they failed to grasp the fact that sea power is the ability to maintain one’s own lines of sea communication, and to deny such lines of communication to the enemy. Their failure adequately to use their powerful submarine force against their enemies’ lines of sea communication, and adequately to protect their own lines of sea communication against enemy submarine attacks, is evidence of that. In commenting on this the British naval historian remarks that the concluding months of the war against Japan show the fatal consequences of departure from well-established principles:

For nearly six years Germany tried her utmost to bring Britain to her knees by blockade; and she failed. Yet in little more than half that time Japan was utterly defeated by the very same instruments—the submarine, the bomber, and the mine—which Germany had deployed against us in vain. It was the sinking of her merchant ships which deprived Japan of oil, of food for her people, and of raw material for her industries; and it was the loss of those ships which, for all the sacrifices made by her people, rendered further resistance impossible.<sup>3</sup>

To the Royal Navy and its daughter navies of the British Commonwealth of Nations must go much of the credit for the successful outcome

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<sup>3</sup> Roskill, *The War At Sea*, Vol III, Part II, p. 381.

for the Allies. They were actively in the war from the outbreak of hostilities in September 1939. For the first two years of the war it was they who, by the correct application of the principles of sea power, held the ring and gave that breathing space to their great American ally which enabled her to summon up her strength and muster her enormous industrial potential to bring overwhelming force to bear after her entry into the war in December 1941. None worked more closely together during the holding period than the Royal and Royal Australian Navies. During the dark days in the Mediterranean, at Dakar, in the Middle East, they were side by side. Their close association continued after the extension of the war with the entry of Japan and America; and a grown, and growing, Australian Navy played a full part with its fellows from the West and from the East. In the Indian Ocean, the ABDA Area, the South-West Pacific, the Mediterranean again, on to the shore of Japan up to the last day of the war, the Australian Navy was there with its British and American companions, in the exercise of that sea power which decided the issue of the conflict.

## APPENDIX 1

### THE DEFENSIVELY EQUIPPED MERCHANT SHIPS

**D**URING the war 37 officers and 1,070 ratings served as Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships' personnel in the Royal Australian Navy. Imperial and Allied ships numbering 251 were supplied, or partly supplied, with R.A.N. personnel (D.E.M.S.) as were 124 Australian ships.

The number of Australian naval men supplied to ships varied with the particular year in which they embarked, and with the armament, nationality and type of merchant ship's crew. In 1939 and most of 1940 the general rule was to embark when possible one rating to each gun mounted. An exception to this rule was made when the ship was manned by a coloured crew, when three ratings were embarked. Where possible a gunlayer was drafted in charge of armament but, since the number of gunlayers was limited, many ships left Australia with an able seaman gunner in charge of the armament. Three ratings were embarked in tankers, even if only one low angle gun was mounted, because of the importance of these ships.

In the early days of the German invasion of Norway and Denmark, D.E.M.S. personnel, officers and ratings, were from time to time embarked in Norwegian and Danish ships as armed guards.

As the war progressed and the armament of merchant ships increased, so did the number of D.E.M.S. men carried. Ships trading from Australia to Indian ports, and those operating in Northern Australian and New Guinea waters, carried a multiplicity of anti-aircraft weapons. Merchant ships carried from 6 to 10 ratings under a petty officer gunlayer; and troop transports had up to 12 ratings. When Bofors guns were mounted a Bofors crew of Maritime Royal Artillery was supplied in addition to the naval ratings embarked.

Thus *Duntroon*, armed with one 4-inch Mk. XIX, one 12-pounder, two Bofors, six Oerlikons, two 2-inch U.P. (Pillar Boxes) and F.A.M.'s, carried one lieutenant R.A.N.V.R. as D.E.M.S. gunnery officer, two petty officer gunlayers, 16 other ratings and eight M.R.A. as Bofors crew. She and *Reynella* (formerly the Italian ship *Remo*) were the most heavily armed Australian ships. The manning position necessitated the provision of R.N. D.E.M.S. ratings and M.R.A. details; and in 1943 a number of Australian ships were entirely manned so far as D.E.M.S. was concerned with R.N. ratings and M.R.A. details.

*Queen Mary* was originally armed at Sydney (6-inch O.B.L.) in May 1940, and an Australian D.E.M.S. gun's crew was embarked. When she was transferred to the North Atlantic run, ferrying American troops to Britain, she carried a lieutenant R.N.V.R. as gunnery officer, a lieutenant R.N.V.R. and 70-odd D.E.M.S. ratings and M.R.A. details—still with the same R.A.N.R. petty officer (as senior P.O.) who had embarked in Sydney in 1940. He left the ship in March 1943.

The first R.A.N. men to reach German prison camps in the war were six Australian D.E.M.S. gunners from the British ships *Maimoa*, *Port Brisbane* and *Port Wellington*, sunk by German surface raiders in the Indian Ocean.

In all, 18 Australian D.E.M.S. ratings were prisoners of war of the Germans as the result of their ships being sunk or captured. Two Australian D.E.M.S. ratings became prisoners of the Japanese in m.v. *Hauraki*, taken in prize in the Indian Ocean by the Japanese A.M.C's *Hokoku Maru* and *Aikoku Maru*.

On the other side of the ledger, when the Dutch tanker *Ondina*, in company with H.M.I.S. *Bengal*, was intercepted by *Hokoku Maru* and *Aikoku Maru* in the Indian Ocean on 11th November 1942, *Hokoku Maru* was sunk in a gun battle between the four ships.

Of the 1,070 R.A.N. D.E.M.S. ratings, 38 lost their lives when their ships were sunk, were killed on board or were "missing presumed dead". One or two were killed in air raids in England. One was drowned (from the Dutch ship *Sibigo*) when swimming from a raft to pick up a parcel dropped from a rescue aircraft.

## APPENDIX 2

### THE MINESWEEPERS

WHEN the Second World War broke out in 1939 one of the first steps taken by the Naval Board was the establishment of the nucleus of a minesweeping fleet. On 3rd September 1939, in addition to the ships which were taken up for service as Armed Merchant Cruisers, three merchant ships were taken up for service as minesweepers: *Tongkol* and *Goolgwai* at Sydney and *Doomba* at Brisbane. Additional to these, the sloops *Yarra* and *Swan* were to be converted to minesweeping vessels.

By the end of September 1939 ships requisitioned from trade for minesweeping duties numbered eight: *Doomba*, *Orara*, *Tongkol*, *Beryl II*, *Goorangai*, *Goolgwai*, *Olive Cam* and *Korowa*. These were the nucleus of a minesweeping fleet which eventually comprised 36 auxiliary minesweepers, requisitioned merchant vessels, and 56 A.M.S. ships built as minesweepers—known as “corvettes”.

The first minesweeping operation was carried out after the lighthouse-keeper at Gabo Island reported seeing a warship 10 miles in the offing at 5 a.m. on 10th October 1939. The sloops *Swan* and *Yarra* carried out a sweep with negative results until sunset on 13th October.

On 13th November 1939 the first minesweeping flotilla was formed: the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla—*Swan*, *Yarra*, *Doomba* and *Orara*. Other ships joined and left the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla throughout 1940 and 1941, including some of the A.M.S. vessels as they commissioned.

The first “genuine” minesweeping operation—as distinct from searching sweeps and the establishment of searched channels at ports—was in November 1940, following the sinking of the British ship *Cambridge* and the American *City of Rayville* respectively, off Wilson’s Promontory and Cape Otway. *Warrego*, *Swan*, *Beryl II*, *Goorangai*, *Orara*, *Durraween*, *Korowa*, *Nambucca* and *Goolgwai* were employed locating minefields (laid by German surface raiders) and cutting mines. By 1st December 12 mines had been swept in the Wilson’s Promontory area and two in the Otway area, and one floater was destroyed in the Point Lonsdale area. Within a few weeks other minefields were located and swept off Norah Head, New South Wales, and off South Neptune Island, South Australia.

The 20th Minesweeping Flotilla concluded operations at the end of 1941, and did not resume until it was re-formed in 1945. The A.M.S. vessels, which were coming into commission, operated not as minesweepers during most of the war but as escort and combat vessels. Thirteen of them were with the Eastern Fleet—and eight of those spent a period in the Mediterranean in 1943 and took part in the invasion of Sicily. Others of these hardworked little ships took part in most of the operations in the South-West Pacific—as escort ships and combat vessels.

Some of these were from time to time in the 24th Minesweeping

Flotilla, based on Darwin. But their sweeping was occasional routine sweeps. Most of the time they were engaged on anti-submarine and escort work.

Minesweeping groups, of auxiliary minesweepers, were maintained at ports around Australia: Group 50, Sydney; Group 54, Melbourne; Group 60, Hobart; Group 63, Adelaide; Group 66, Fremantle; Group 70, Darwin; Group 74, Brisbane; and Group 77, Newcastle.

In November 1944, with the end of the war in distant sight, the Admiralty arranged for a number of the A.M.S. ships (which though manned by the R.A.N. were on Admiralty account) to be formed into flotillas of minesweepers for service with the British Pacific Fleet, and the 21st and 22nd Minesweeping Flotillas were formed. But most of their work was as escorts with the British Pacific Fleet. Sweeping operations were, however, carried out by Australian and Australian-manned A.M.S. ships in the South-West Pacific, over widespread areas from Bougainville to Hong Kong.

The first R.A.N. ship sunk in the war was one of the auxiliary minesweepers—*Goorangai*, sunk on 20th November 1940 after collision with m.v. *Duntroon* just off the South Channel in Port Phillip Bay. Her full complement of 24 officers and men was lost. No Australian minesweepers were lost due to minesweeping operations, but some were lost from other causes. On 1st December 1942 *Armidale* was sunk by Japanese aircraft south of Timor, with heavy loss of life. On 22nd January 1943 another of the auxiliary minesweepers was sunk, again by Japanese aircraft attack—H.M.A.S. *Patricia Cam*, which was bombed and sunk off Wessel Island, northern Australia. Another of the A.M.S. vessels was sunk—again a marine casualty—on 11th June 1943, when H.M.A.S. *Wallaroo* was sunk in collision off Western Australia, run down by one of the convoy she had been escorting. And, again a marine casualty, H.M.A.S. *Geelong* was sunk in collision with an American tanker off Langemak, New Guinea, on 18th October 1944.

Manned almost wholly by Reserve commanding officers, officers and ratings, the minesweepers and auxiliary minesweepers of the R.A.N. did a valuable and varied job—often far in excess of the type of work for which they had been designed.

### APPENDIX 3

## PEAK STRENGTHS—SHIPS AND PERSONNEL— AND CASUALTIES

Ships of the R.A.N. in service at 30th June 1945 totalled 337, comprising:

Cruisers . . . . .	4	Boom Defence vessels . . . . .	4
Destroyers . . . . .	11	Boom Gate vessels . . . . .	6
Frigates . . . . .	6	Tugs . . . . .	6
Sloops . . . . .	2	Cable Repair ships . . . . .	2
A.M.S. Vessels (Corvettes) . . . . .	53	Survey ships . . . . .	9
Landing Ships, Infantry . . . . .	3	Motor launches . . . . .	33
Anti-Submarine auxiliaries . . . . .	3	Harbour Defence motor launches . . . . .	28
Minesweepers auxiliaries . . . . .	6	Air Sea Rescue vessels . . . . .	20
Minelayers . . . . .	1	Naval Auxiliary Patrol vessels . . . . .	75
Fleet oilers . . . . .	1	Services Reconnaissance vessels . . . . .	8
Store ships . . . . .	12	Miscellaneous vessels . . . . .	41
Repair ships . . . . .	3		

The peak wartime strength of the R.A.N., including officers and ratings, W.R.A.N.S. and Nursing Sisters, was 39,650. This figure, reached on 30th June 1945, comprised:

	Officers	Ratings
R.N., R.A.N., Permanent Naval Forces . . . . .	838	6,219
Royal Australian Fleet Reserve . . . . .		963
Royal Fleet Reserve . . . . .		7
Pensioners, Royal Navy and Royal Marines . . . . .		106 men
R.A.N.R. (Seagoing) . . . . .	476	
R.A.N.R. . . . .	794	24,566
R.A.N.V.R. . . . .	1,645	1,350
R.N.V.R. . . . .	8	
R.N.R. . . . .	4	
Women's Royal Australian Naval Service . . . . .	108	2,509
Nursing Sisters . . . . .	57	

The strength of the R.A.N. at 30th June 1945 was 36,976, comprising 3,765 officers and 33,211 ratings—including 676 *Perth* complement and 21 others missing, excluding the women's services.

The casualties in the Royal Australian Navy and Royal Navy serving with the R.A.N. during the period of hostilities (3rd September 1939 to 15th August 1945) were:

	Officers	Ratings
Killed in action . . . . .	16	111
Died of wounds . . . . .	10	35
Missing presumed dead . . . . .	144	1,407
Died as prisoners of war . . . . .	6	113
Drowned (due to service) . . . . .	4	65
Drowned (not due to service) . . . . .	2	10
Accidentally killed (due to service) . . . . .	5	31
Accidentally killed (not due to service) . . . . .	4	60
Died of natural causes . . . . .	28	119
Total . . . . .	219	1,951 <sup>1</sup>

The casualties in the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service were 1 rating accidentally killed (not due to service) and 5 ratings died of natural causes.

War service casualties (hostilities) in R.A.N. ships totalled 1,852—excluding deaths not due to service. Losses by ships were:

<i>Armidade:</i>	R.A.N.	1 officer and 9 ratings killed in action; 2 ratings died of wounds; 1 officer and 26 ratings missing presumed dead.
	R.N.	1 rating missing presumed dead.
	Netherlands	Army: 2 officers and 58 native troops missing presumed dead.
<i>Arunta:</i>	R.A.N.	2 ratings died of wounds.
<i>Australia:</i>	R.A.N.	Leyte—2 officers and 6 ratings killed in action; 5 officers and 17 ratings died of wounds. Lingayen—1 officer and 25 ratings killed in action; 1 officer died of wounds; 1 officer and 16 ratings presumed dead. Other than in Philippines—1 rating accidentally killed; 1 officer and 3 ratings presumed dead.
	R.N.	1 officer missing presumed dead.
<i>Bundaberg:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating accidentally killed.
<i>Burnie:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating accidentally killed.
<i>Canberra:</i>	R.A.N.	1 officer and 8 ratings died of wounds; 7 officers and 60 ratings missing presumed dead.
	R.N.	2 ratings presumed dead.
	R.A.A.F.	1 officer and 3 airmen presumed dead; 1 airman died of wounds.
	U.S.N.	1 officer presumed dead.
<i>Chinampa:</i>	R.A.N.	1 officer killed in action
<i>Colac:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating killed in action; 1 rating died of wounds.
<i>Echuca:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating drowned.
<i>Gascoyne:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating drowned.
<i>Goorangai:</i>	R.A.N.	3 officers and 21 ratings drowned.
<i>Gunbar:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating died of wounds.

<sup>1</sup> Including 24 RAN officers and 53 ratings lost in Royal Navy ships; 8 RAN officers and 10 ratings lost serving at RN bases and 14 RAN officers and 59 ratings lost in merchant ships.



<i>HDML1326:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating accidentally killed.
<i>Hobart:</i>	R.A.N.	4 officers and 3 ratings killed in action; 3 officers and 3 ratings presumed dead.
<i>Kangaroo:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating killed in action.
<i>Kara Kara:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating killed in action; 1 rating died of wounds.
<i>Karangi:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating accidentally killed.
<i>Katoomba:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating accidentally killed.
<i>Kiama:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating missing presumed dead.
<i>Koala:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating drowned.
<i>Kookaburra:</i>	R.A.N.	1 officer accidentally killed.
<i>Korowa:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating drowned.
<i>Kuttabul:</i>	R.A.N.	18 ratings killed in action; 1 rating presumed dead.
<i>Lismore:</i>	R.A.N.	3 ratings drowned.
<i>Lithgow:</i>	R.A.N.	1 officer accidentally killed.
<i>Lolita:</i>	R.A.N.	2 ratings accidentally killed.
<i>Manoora:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating died as a prisoner of war.
<i>Matafele:</i>	R.A.N.	4 officers and 20 ratings missing presumed dead; 13 native crew missing presumed dead.
<i>ML427:</i>	R.A.N.	3 ratings accidentally drowned.
<i>Napier:</i>	R.A.N.	1 officer and 2 ratings drowned.
<i>Nestor:</i>	R.A.N.	3 ratings killed in action.
	R.N.	1 rating killed in action.
<i>Nizam:</i>	R.A.N.	12 ratings drowned.
<i>Norman:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating drowned.
<i>Parramatta:</i>	R.A.N.	9 officers and 121 ratings missing presumed dead.
	R.N.	1 officer and 7 ratings missing presumed dead.
<i>Patricia Cam:</i>	R.A.N.	2 ratings killed in action; 2 ratings missing presumed dead; 1 rating died of wounds. 2 natives killed in action, 1 died of wounds. 1 passenger (Rev. Kentish) subsequently executed by Japanese.
<i>Perth:</i>	R.A.N.	1 officer and 10 ratings killed in action; 17 officers and 321 ratings presumed dead; 104 ratings died while prisoners of war; 1 rating drowned.
	R.N.	5 officers and 2 ratings missing presumed dead; 1 rating died while prisoner of war.
	R.A.A.F.	4 airmen missing presumed dead.
	Canteen staff	—3 missing presumed dead.
<i>Pirie:</i>	R.A.N.	1 officer and 6 ratings killed in action.
<i>Platypus:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating accidentally killed.
<i>Quickmatch:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating accidentally killed.
<i>Shropshire:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating drowned; 1 rating accidentally killed.
<i>Southern Cross:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating accidentally killed.
<i>Stuart:</i>	R.A.N.	3 ratings accidentally killed.
<i>Swan:</i>	R.A.N.	3 ratings killed in action.
<i>Sydney:</i>	R.A.N.	36 officers and 592 ratings missing presumed dead.
	R.N.	5 officers and 2 ratings missing presumed dead.
	R.A.A.F.	1 officer and 5 airmen missing presumed dead.
	Canteen staff	—4 missing presumed dead.
<i>Tambar:</i>	R.A.N.	1 officer and 2 ratings accidentally killed.
<i>Vampire:</i>	R.A.N.	6 ratings killed in action; 1 officer and 2 ratings missing presumed dead; 2 ratings died of wounds.
	R.N.	1 rating killed in action; 1 officer died of wounds.
<i>Vendetta:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating drowned.
<i>Voyager:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating drowned; 1 rating accidentally killed.
<i>Wallaroo:</i>	R.A.N.	2 ratings killed in action; 1 rating missing presumed dead.

<i>Warrnambool:</i>	R.A.N.	3 ratings died of wounds; 1 rating missing presumed dead.
<i>Whang Pu:</i>	R.A.N.	1 rating drowned.
<i>Yarra:</i>	R.A.N.	8 officers and 124 ratings missing presumed dead; 1 rating accidentally killed.
	R.N.	5 ratings missing presumed dead.
	Canteen staff	—1 rating missing presumed dead.

Total war service casualties (hostilities) in R.A.N. ships were:

R.A.N.	.	.	.	113 officers, 1,603 ratings
R.N.	.	.	.	13 officers, 22 ratings
R.A.A.F.	.	.	.	2 officers, 13 airmen
U.S.N.	.	.	.	1 officer
Canteen Staff	.	.	.	8
Netherlands Army	.	.	.	2 officers, 58 native troops
Native crew	.	.	.	16
Passengers	.	.	.	1
Total loss of life—1,852				

## APPENDIX 4

### THE R.A.N.V.R. ON MINE DISPOSAL

**A**SIDE from the main stream of the story of the Royal Australian Navy in the War of 1939-1945 is that of the officers and men who were with the Royal Navy. Most of them were in ships. A number of them were on special work, such as mine disposal. The story would be incomplete without mention of them and of their achievements.

In 1944 Lieut-Commander J. A. Blaikie, R.A.N.R.—an officer temporarily on duty in the United Kingdom at the time of the invasion of Normandy—told something of them in an article published in *H.M.A.S. Mk. III*:

In these days, when the majority of the ships and men of the Royal Australian Navy are serving against the Japanese in the Pacific, there is a tendency to overlook, or to minimise, the sterling work being done by that section of the personnel who are serving in other parts of the world. The record of the "N" and "Q" Class destroyers and the A.M.S. vessels stationed outside the Pacific has been noted, but there are approximately 500 other Australians representing a portion of our Navy whose achievements so far have not to any extent been published.

These are the officers and ratings—most of them members of the Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve—who are on loan to the Royal Navy. They are serving in every type of vessel, from the largest battleships to the smallest landing craft; they are carrying out every type of duty, from gunnery to salvage work, from command and first lieutenancies in submarines to instructing in navigation or anti-submarine work at shore bases. . . .

The Admiralty move carefully in selecting officers to command warships, yet in June 1944 the following commands were held by R.A.N.V.R. officers serving with the Royal Navy: one destroyer, one frigate, two corvettes, one submarine, one fleet minesweeper, four flotillas of tank landing craft. . . . This list . . . does not take into account the considerable number of Australians commanding individual "little ships", such as motor torpedo boats and various types of landing craft.

Up to the 11th July 1944 Australian Naval personnel, in all theatres of war, had won a total of 531 decorations and awards and, of that number, 86 had gone to 72 of the reservists serving on loan to the Royal Navy. At the head of that list stood Australia's most highly decorated officer of this war—holder of the George Cross, George Medal and Bar. . . .

This officer was Lieutenant Hugh Randall Syme, G.C., G.M. and Bar, R.A.N.V.R. He was one of eight R.A.N.V.R. officers who were awarded the George Cross and/or the George Medal for gallantry and devotion to duty in mine disposal work. Not all of this was with naval mines. In a number of instances the mines were land mines dropped by aircraft during the German raids on London in 1940 and 1941. Some of these—including some dealt with by Syme—were buried deep underground and were most difficult to get at, this adding to the great hazards of the work. In other instances they were under water, in conditions which, to quote from one report, "called for an exceptionally high standard of personal courage and also a high degree of skill. The conditions were always arduous, and

were combined with the presence of known mines in the docks, and with all forms of underwater obstruction—human corpses—which together with lack of visibility produced a set of conditions which would deter the boldest."

In every instance of the award of the George Cross and the George Medal to these R.A.N. recipients, the citation tells of "gallant and undaunted devotion to duty" . . . "courage, initiative and devotion to duty" . . . "skill and undaunted devotion to duty". There could be no higher commendation.

Lieutenant Syme was born in Melbourne in 1903. He was mobilised in September 1940 as Sub-Lieutenant on Probation. He proceeded to England and his mine disposal work was done there, in conditions of extreme danger and difficulty. He was awarded the George Medal in June 1941; the Bar to the Medal in June 1942; the George Cross in August 1943. He was demobilised in February 1944. He died in Melbourne on 7th November 1965.

Lieut-Commander John Stuart Mould, G.C., G.M., R.A.N.V.R., was born in Newcastle-on-Tyne, England in 1910. He was mobilised in New South Wales in September 1940 as Sub-Lieutenant on Probation. He then went to England where his mine disposal work included that of rendering safe German acoustic mines, in which he solved the mystery of a new type. For this and other R.M.S. (Rendering Mines Safe) work he was awarded the George Medal in April 1942 and the George Cross in November 1942. At the Admiralty in 1945 he was appointed to a position carrying acting Commander rank. He was demobilised in November 1945. He died on 9th August 1957.

Lieut-Commander Leon Verdi Goldsworthy, G.C., D.S.C., G.M., R.A.N.V.R., was born in Broken Hill, New South Wales, on 19th January 1909. He was mobilised Sub-Lieutenant on Probation in March 1941. He proceeded to England, and in a long period of mine disposal he disposed of German acoustic mines in a number of British harbours. He was awarded the George Medal in April 1944 and the George Cross in September; and in that month was promoted acting Lieut-Commander. In January 1945 he was awarded the D.S.C. for stripping the first German "K" type mine from Cherbourg Harbour before the Allied invasion of Europe. He was demobilised in May 1946.

Lieut-Commander George Gosse, G.C., R.A.N.V.R., was born in Harvey, Western Australia, on 16th February 1912. He entered the Royal Australian Naval College in 1926 and became Acting Sub-Lieutenant in September 1932. The following year he left the Navy. In October 1940 he enlisted as an Ordinary Seaman in the Yachtsman Scheme. He was promoted Sub-Lieutenant in April 1941. In Germany in 1945 he recovered from Uebersee Hafen a new type of "Oyster"—pressure—mine, and during the following days rendered safe similar types of mine. He was awarded the George Cross in April 1946. He was demobilised in March 1946 with the war service rank of Lieut-Commander. He died on 31st December 1964.

Lieutenant Howard Dudley Reid, G.M. and Bar, R.A.N.V.R., was born in Wellington, New Zealand, in June 1908. He was mobilised in Sydney, New South Wales, in September 1940 as Sub-Lieutenant on Probation. He proceeded to England and in 1940 and 1941 he rendered safe mines which had buried themselves underground, making the work most hazardous. He was awarded the George Medal in June 1941 and the Bar to the Medal twelve months later. He was promoted acting Lieut-Commander in September 1944 and was demobilised in April 1946.

Lieutenant Geoffrey John Cliff, O.B.E., G.M. and Bar, R.A.N.V.R., was mobilised Sub-Lieutenant in January 1941. He began work on bomb and mine disposal in April 1941 and during his period in this activity was engaged in many dangerous tasks with aerial mines buried in city debris and in the ground. He was awarded the George Medal in June 1942 and a Bar to the Medal the following November. He became acting Lieut-Commander in September 1943 and was demobilised in January 1946.

Lieutenant James Henry Hyndman Kessack, G.M., R.A.N.V.R., was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in May 1903. Mobilised as Sub-Lieutenant on Probation in New South Wales in September 1940 he then went to England, and in mine disposal work there dealt with 10 unexploded mines. It was while attempting to render a mine safe that he lost his life on 28th April 1941. He was awarded the George Medal posthumously, in June 1941.

Lieutenant Keith Swan Upton, G.M., R.A.N.V.R., was born at Clifton Hill, Victoria, in October 1909. He was mobilised in September 1940 as Sub-Lieutenant on Probation. He then went to England and in October 1941 he successfully dealt with a buried mine in North Wales in circumstances demanding the greatest courage, initiative and ingenuity. He was awarded the George Medal in June 1942. He was demobilised in February 1946.

The other two members of the Royal Australian Navy to be awarded the George Medal during the war were of the permanent Service. Their awards were not for mine disposal of the type described above, but for similar achievements calling for great gallantry and skill.

Vice-Admiral Sir Alan Wedel Ramsay McNicoll, K.B.E., C.B., G.M., was born at Hawthorn, Victoria on 3rd April 1908. He entered the Royal Australian Naval College in January 1922. As a Lieut-Commander, he was awarded the George Medal in July 1941 for coolness and great courage the previous year in removing the inertia pistols from eight torpedoes of a captured Italian submarine. Promoted Rear-Admiral in July 1958 and Vice-Admiral in February 1965, he concluded his naval career in 1968 in the highest office the Service can offer—First Naval Member and Chief of the Naval Staff.

Petty Officer John Thomas Humphries, G.M., R.A.N., entered the Royal Australian Navy as Boy 2nd Class in July 1918. He enlisted in October 1921 for seven years. Subsequently he joined the Fleet Reserve

and was mobilised in September 1939 at Sydney. He served from October 1939 to December 1942 in H.M.S. *Kanimbla*, after which he was on shore service, until demobilised in May 1946. It was while in *Kanimbla*, during salvage operations on the prize ship *Hohenfels* in the Persian Gulf, that he showed skill and courage of the highest degree as a diver in the German ship's flooded engine room. He was awarded the George Medal in February 1942.

## APPENDIX 5

### ABBREVIATIONS

A— <i>Acting, Assistant.</i>	HDML— <i>Harbour Defence Motor Launch.</i>
AA— <i>Anti-Aircraft.</i>	HMAS— <i>His Majesty's Australian Ship.</i>
AB— <i>Able-bodied (seaman).</i>	HMIS— <i>His Majesty's Indian Ship.</i>
ABDA— <i>Australian-British-Dutch-American.</i>	HMNZS— <i>His Majesty's New Zealand Ship.</i>
AHQ— <i>Army Headquarters.</i>	HMS— <i>His Majesty's Ship.</i>
AIB— <i>Allied Intelligence Bureau.</i>	HQ— <i>Headquarters.</i>
AIF— <i>Australian Imperial Force.</i>	IJN— <i>Imperial Japanese Navy.</i>
AKA— <i>Attack Cargo Ship.</i>	Intell— <i>Intelligence.</i>
AMC— <i>Armed Merchant Cruiser.</i>	JCS— <i>Joint Chiefs of Staff.</i>
APA— <i>Attack Transport.</i>	kts— <i>knots.</i>
APD— <i>Transport, High-Speed.</i>	LCI— <i>Landing Craft, Infantry.</i>
ATIS— <i>Allied Translator and Interpreter Section.</i>	LCI(G)— <i>Landing Craft, Infantry (Gunboat).</i>
AVM— <i>Air Vice-Marshal.</i>	LCM— <i>Landing Craft, Mechanised.</i>
AWC— <i>Advisory War Council.</i>	LCPR— <i>Landing Craft, Personnel, Ramp.</i>
Bde— <i>Brigade.</i>	LCS— <i>Landing Craft, Support.</i>
Bn— <i>Battalion.</i>	LCT— <i>Landing Craft, Tank.</i>
Brig— <i>Brigadier.</i>	LCVP— <i>Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel.</i>
Cdo— <i>Commando.</i>	Ldg— <i>Leading.</i>
CGS— <i>Chief of the General Staff.</i>	LHQ— <i>Allied Land Forces Headquarters.</i>
CIGS— <i>Chief of the Imperial General Staff.</i>	LSD— <i>Landing Ship, Dock.</i>
C-in-C— <i>Commander-in-Chief.</i>	LSI— <i>Landing Ship, Infantry.</i>
CNS— <i>Chief of the Naval Staff.</i>	LSM— <i>Landing Ship, Medium.</i>
CO— <i>Commanding Officer.</i>	LST— <i>Landing Ship, Tank.</i>
COIC— <i>Combined Operations and Intelligence Centre.</i>	LVT— <i>Landing Vehicle, Tracked.</i>
Col— <i>Colonel.</i>	ME— <i>Middle East.</i>
Comd— <i>Commanded.</i>	MG— <i>Machine Gun.</i>
COSSAC— <i>Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander.</i>	ML— <i>Motor Launch.</i>
CPO— <i>Chief Petty Officer.</i>	MRA— <i>Maritime Royal Artillery.</i>
CTF— <i>Commander Task Force.</i>	MSF— <i>Minesweeping Flotilla.</i>
CWO— <i>Commissioned Warrant Officer.</i>	NAAFI— <i>Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes.</i>
DCNS— <i>Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff.</i>	NEI— <i>Netherlands East Indies.</i>
DEMS— <i>Defensively Equipped Merchant Ship.</i>	NG— <i>New Guinea.</i>
DNI— <i>Director of Naval Intelligence.</i>	NGVR— <i>New Guinea Volunteer Rifles.</i>
DUKW— <i>Amphibian truck, 2½ tons.</i>	NICA— <i>Netherlands Indies Civil Affairs.</i>
ERA— <i>Engine Room Artificer.</i>	NOIC— <i>Naval Officer-in-Charge.</i>
GHQ— <i>General Headquarters.</i>	NT— <i>Northern Territory.</i>
GOC— <i>General Officer Commanding.</i>	OD— <i>Ordinary Seaman.</i>
Gp— <i>Group.</i>	Ops— <i>Operations.</i>
GSO— <i>General Staff Officer.</i>	OTC— <i>Officer in Tactical Command.</i>

- PC—*Patrol Craft.*  
pdr—*pounder.*  
PT—*Patrol Torpedo (boat).*
- RAAF—*Royal Australian Air Force.*  
RAF—*Royal Air Force.*  
RAN—*Royal Australian Navy.*  
RANR—*Royal Australian Naval Reserve.*  
RANVR—*Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve.*  
RCT—*Regimental Combat Team.*  
RIN—*Royal Indian Navy.*  
RN—*Royal Navy.*  
RNR—*Royal Naval Reserve.*  
RNVR—*Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.*  
RNZNR—*Royal New Zealand Naval Reserve.*
- SC—*Submarine Chaser.*  
SEAC—*South-East Asia Command.*  
SNO—*Senior Naval Officer.*  
SNOPG—*Senior Naval Officer Persian Gulf.*
- SOPAC—*South Pacific Area.*  
Sqn—*Squadron.*  
SRD—*Services Reconnaissance Department.*  
SWPA—*South-West Pacific Area.*
- TAF—*Tactical Air Force.*  
TBS—*Talk Between Ships (radio).*  
TF—*Task Force.*  
TG—*Task Group.*
- US—*United States (of America).*  
USAAF—*United States Army Air Force.*  
USASOS—*United States Army Services of Supply.*  
USN—*United States Navy.*  
USS—*United States Ship.*
- WRANS—*Women's Royal Australian Naval Service.*
- YMS—*US Motor Minesweeper.*



# INDEX

- Aagtekerk*, Netherlands ship, 91  
 ABADAN, 80, 193, 203, 357, 547  
 ABDA AREA, 15, 705  
*Abdiel*, British minelayer, 311-12  
 ABE, Rear-Adm H., 230-1, 233  
*Abner Read*, US destroyer, 381, 400, 417*n*, 423-4, 426, 431, 480-1; sunk, 535  
*Abraham Crijnsen*, Netherlands minesweeper, 693  
*Abukuma*, Japanese cruiser, 14, 499, 519, 523, 527; sunk, 528  
 ACCOUNTANT OPERATION, 269-70  
*Achates*, British destroyer, 250  
*Achilles*, NZ cruiser, 4, 10, 273, 663  
 ACHESE OPERATION, 311  
 ACROBAT OPERATION, 112  
 ACROMA, 92, 97  
*Active*, British destroyer, 208  
*Activity*, British escort carrier, 555-6, 574  
 ADACHI, Lt-Gen Hatazo, 409, 461-2; comds *XVIII Army*, 399-400; surrenders, 690  
 ADAMS, Private, 161  
 ADAMS, Rear-Adm W. L. G., 155*n*  
 ADAMSON, Lt C. T. J., 267, 327  
 ADDU ATOLL (Sketch p. 389), 12, 16, 19, 203-4, 206-7, 393, 547  
*Adelaide*, Australian cruiser, 124*n*, 292, 696; Australia Station, 65, 101; encounter with *Ramses*, 197-8; escorts 9 Aust Div convoy, 287; West Australian waters, 390, 417, 419  
 ADELAIDE (Sketch p. 33), 72, 77, 549, 551, 572  
*Adele*, Australian examination vessel, 77  
 ADEM, EL, 92, 97  
 ADEN (Sketch p. 192), 28, 205, 298, 302, 314, 354, 359, 382, 384-5, 388, 394  
 ADEN, GULF OF (Sketch p. 192), 203, 205-6, 295, 359, 382, 384, 386  
*Aden Maru*, Japanese ship, 413  
*Admiral Hipper*, German cruiser, 250  
 ADMIRALTY ISLANDS (Map p. 263; Sketch p. 437), 275, 347, 364-6, 369-70, 381, 397-8, 401, 411-13, 416, 420, 438, 470, 480, 488, 572, 579; operations in, 371-80  
*Age*, Australian steamer, 74-5  
 AGETA, Cdr K., 62  
 A-GO OPERATION, 398, 414-16, 435, 443, 453-4, 497-8  
*Agovi Prince*, 197*n*  
 AGUNG PEAK, 324  
 AHIOMA, 167-8  
*Aikoku Maru*, Japanese armed merchant cruiser, 29, 77, 191, 193, 195-6, 707; sunk, 197  
 AINSWORTH, Rear-Adm W. L., 289, 451, 453  
 AIRCRAFT CARRIERS, 612, 703  
*Airedale*, British destroyer, 93  
 AIRTAPE (Map p. 263; Sketch p. 437), 381, 399, 400, 402, 409, 416, 436, 482, 489, 493, 578, 625-9, 633; operations at, 405, 461-3  
*Aiyo Maru*, Japanese ship, 270*n*  
*Ajax*, British cruiser, 445  
*Akagi*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 13, 81; sunk, 86, 87*n*  
*Akatsuki*, Japanese destroyer, 233  
*Akebono*, Japanese destroyer, 40, 528  
*Akitsuki*, Japanese destroyer, 532  
 AKYAB (Sketch p. 563), 350-2, 558-60, 562-8, 570, 660  
 ALAMAGORDO, 670, 672  
 ALAMEIN, EL (Sketch p. 300), 97-8, 184, 199  
 ALANBROOKE, Field Marshal Viscount, 351-2, 359, 444, 475  
*Alatna*, Australian tender, 700  
*Alaunia*, British armed merchant cruiser, 204-5  
*Albacore*, US submarine, 457  
*Albatross*, Australian seaplane carrier, 188, 296  
*Albert Gallatin*, US ship, 382  
*Albert W. Grant*, US destroyer, 526, 638, 640, 654, 656  
*Alcantara*, British armed merchant cruiser, 63  
*Alert*, Australian survey boat, 601  
 ALEUTIAN ISLANDS (Map p. 83), 23-4, 58-9, 76, 80-1, 88, 109-10, 225, 478; Japanese attack on, 82, 87  
 ALEXANDER, Field Marshal Rt Hon Earl, 10, 200, 299, 311  
 ALEXANDRIA (Sketch p. 300), 2, 19, 60, 80, 89-91, 93, 96-7, 104, 115, 184, 202, 255*n*, 262, 299-302, 305, 306-8, 312-14  
*Alex Diachenko*, US destroyer transport, 654  
 ALEXISHAFEN, 370, 438-40  
 ALGERIA (Sketch p. 300), 202, 298  
 ALGIERS (Sketch p. 300), 199, 201-2, 299, 304, 317, 445  
 ALIM ISLAND (Sketch p. 437), 438  
*Allara*, Australian ship, 158-9  
*Allen*, US destroyer, 11  
 ALLIED AIR FORCES S.W.P.A., 42, 236, 243, 333, 381, 390, 411-12, 419, 444*n*, 661; New Guinea operations, 120-1, 166-7, 174, 269, 280-1, 283, 395, 402*n*, 407-8, 411-12, 414, 416, 420, 483-4; Solomons offensive, 133*n*, 235; Battle of Bismarck Sea, 270-1, 331; New Britain, 345-6; Gilbert Islands, 348; New Ireland, 366-7; Admiralty Islands, 370; Morotai, 481; Philippines, 494, 522, 594, 600-1, 603; Okinawa, 604-5; Formosa, 607; Borneo, 619-20, 637, 653; Japan, 659, 662  
 ALLIED INTELLIGENCE BUREAU, 332-3, 340, 342, 441, 487, 490, 627-9, 633-4; formation of, 238; raids on Singapore Harbour, 317-25, 543-6, 691-2  
 —Inter-Allied Services Department, 318  
 —Services Reconnaissance Department, 317-18  
 —"Z" Special Unit, 213-14, 318  
 ALLIED LAND FORCES HEADQUARTERS (L.H.Q.), 215, 237, 331*n*, 619  
 ALLIED NAVAL FORCES, 4, 167-8, 202, 236, 241, 274, 282, 331*n*, 445-7, 450, 453-4, 620  
 ALLISTON, Cdr J. M.; comds *Javelin*, 94, *Warrawunga*, 430, 537, 579, 584, 602  
*Altmark*, German tanker, 193*n*  
*Aludra*, Netherlands ship, 557*n*  
*AM1499*, *AM1629*, *AM1983*, *AM1985*, Australian ships, 689  
*Amagi*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 498, 665  
*Amagiri*, Japanese destroyer, 12*n*, 14*n*, 290  
 AMBON ISLAND, 39, 211-12, 264, 413, 468; Japanese surrender at, 696-9  
 AMBROSIO, General V., 303, 310  
*Ameer*, British escort carrier, 559, 568-9, 660  
 AMERICA, UNITED STATES OF (Map p. 678), 1, 24, 29-30, 32, 34, 56, 107, 109, 112, 208*n*, 250, 304, 694, 705; shipbuilding, 35-6, 249; possesses Japanese code secrets, 37; opposed to Mediterranean side of proposed operations in North Africa, 200; plans to assemble forces in Britain for invasion of France, 274-5; supports offensive in Burma, 359; opposed to other land forces taking part in Philippines operations, 489  
 AMERICAN AIR FORCES, 24, 39, 44, 50, 121, 127, 131-2, 171, 208, 328, 345, 347, 364, 406, 444, 519, 523, 528, 575-7, 597, 599, 661  
 —FAR EAST AIR FORCE, 577  
 —FIFTH AIR FORCE, 241, 246, 268, 272, 330, 333, 343*n*, 370-1, 396, 400, 403, 416, 649  
 —NAVAL AIR FORCE, 84-5, 133, 164, 609-10. *Fleet Air Wing* 10, 295, 649  
 —THIRTEENTH AIR FORCE, 622, 648*n*, 649  
 —TWENTIETH AIR FORCE, 604, 606; drops atomic bomb on Hiroshima, 672-3  
 AMERICAN ARMY, 31, 37, 118, 125, 187, 199, 201, 246, 267, 350, 408, 419-20, 435, 442-4, 447, 454, 460, 487, 513, 575, 597-8, 602, 665  
 —UNITED STATES ARMY SERVICES OF SUPPLY, 158*n*, 620  
 —ARMIES: *Fifth*, 447-8. *Sixth*, 335, 338, 341, 370, 405, 480, 494, 575, 577, 594, 677. *Eighth*, 677. *Tenth*, 604-5  
 —CORPS: VI, 445, 447. X, 494, 513. XI, 481, 596. XXIV, 480, 494-5, 510, 605, 677  
 —DIVISIONS: Americal, 6, 10, 113, 227-8, 603. 1st Cavalry, 371, 379, 494-5. 6th Infantry, 461, 577-8; 7th, 494-5; 24th, 396, 404, 408, 494-5; 27th, 347-8; 31st, 481, 483, 486, 489; 32nd, 109, 242, 409, 436, 481, 494; 37th, 482, 577; 40th, 490, 577-8, 591; 41st, 109, 269, 396, 405, 416, 420*n*; 43rd, 577-8; 77th, 494, 539; 81st, 489; 96th, 494-5

## AMERICAN ARMY—continued

—FORCES: *Alamo*, 338, 341, 415. *MacKechnie*, 285-6  
 —ARTILLERY: *32nd Anti-Aircraft Bde*, 494  
 —ENGINEERS: 118, 487, 651. *2nd Engineer Special Bde*, 338, 344, 494

—CAVALRY AND INFANTRY REGIMENTS: 112th Cavalry, 338; 21st Infantry, 494-5; 126th, 345, 481; 162nd, 269-70, 285-6, 396; 163rd, 405, 409, 416, 420n; 164th, 227; 168th, 442-3; 182nd, 10; 186th, 396

*American Arrow*, US tanker, 560

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT, 31, 190, 351; agrees on "Beat Hitler First" strategy, 106

—JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, 30-1, 33, 107, 110-12, 114, 171, 274-6, 352-3, 362, 365-6, 449-50, 468, 473, 478-9, 496, 572, 575, 611; defines Pacific and South-West Pacific Areas, 32; jurisdiction in operational strategy, 34; directives, 117, 275-7, 397, 411, 617-18; on marking of hospital ships, 260; and Casablanca Conference decisions, 303; role of Britain in defeat of Japan, 468-9; proposed use of British Fleet in Pacific, 474, 616-17; plans for defeat of Japan, 666

—NAVY DEPARTMENT, 208n, 276-7

—WAR DEPARTMENT, 36, 111, 225, 276

—WAR SHIPPING ADMINISTRATION, 36, 542

AMERICAN NAVY, 27-8, 38, 54, 87, 111, 267, 349-50, 387, 391, 415, 417n, 448, 450-1, 475, 487, 556, 572, 675; effect of B. of Atlantic on, 2; strength in Pacific, 3-4, 31, 275; Pacific strategy, 5, 8; in anti-submarine warfare, 29, 35; in Coral Sea, 39-40, 51-2, 55; in B. of Midway, 59-60, 81-6; virtualising in, 102-3; development of Aust bases, 105; in Solomons offensive, 120-1, 153-4, 161, 164, 167, 247-8, 273, 278-9, 333; in 1943-44 NG offensive, 326, 379, 408, 419, 434-5; in Marshalls, 367; in Normandy invasion, 444-5; in Marianas, 460; relations with RN, 469-70, 616; in Philippines, 532n, 534, 547, 579, 582-3, 585-7, 589, 594; at Okinawa, 608, 610; in Borneo operations, 647-8

—FLEETS, numbered fleet system introduced, 277. *Atlantic*, 4. *Carrier*, 129, 226, 451, 594. *Pacific*, 5, 59n, 60-1, 80-1, 111, 116-17, 121, 153, 171, 186, 413, 474, 694; Japanese seek final reckoning with, 3, 23-4; in Philippines, 494, 515-16; role, 366; Jun 1944 reorganisation, 451; plans seizure of Palau, 461; Iwo Jima and Okinawa, 595. *Third*, 290, 334, 499, 654, 662, 677; formed, 277, 451; in Bismarck Sea area, 366, 379; in Philippines, 495-6, 506, 514-16, 521, 529, 531-2, 534, 577, 595, 679; attacks Formosa, 503; at Balikpapan, 649; attacks Japanese home islands, 659, 663-5, 673; in Tokyo Bay, 680. *Fifth*, 370, 604, 614, 677; formed, 277, 451; in Marshalls, 367-9; in New Guinea operations, 370, 401; attacks Palau, 395; in Marianas, 496; Iwo Jima, 598; Okinawa, 605. *Seventh*, 290, 330, 349, 417, 424, 426, 462n, 482n, 501, 556, 575, 593, 630, 655, 677, 685; formed, 277, 288; in New Guinea ops, 335, 366, 371-2, 400; introduces new TF organisation, 381; in Philippines, 480, 494, 497, 506, 510, 520-2, 529, 534-5, 577-80, 592, 594-6; in Borneo ops, 617, 647-9; British midjet submarines allocated to, 660. *Eleventh*, 605n

—FORCES: Central Pacific, redesignated Fifth Fleet, 277. North Pacific, 679. South Pacific, 113, 121, 451; redesignated Third Fleet, 277. South-West Pacific, redesignated Seventh Fleet, 277. *I Amphibious*, 331. *III Amphib*, 277, 289, 451, 488, 605; in Solomons-NG ops, 285, 330-1, 333, 370; in Philippines, 494, 501, 577, 588. *V Amphib*, 349, 451. *VII Amphib*, 341n, 481, 489, 501; formed, 171, 277; in Solomons-NG ops, 285, 327, 329, 338, 370-1, 373, 418; in Philippines, 480, 494-5, 588; in Borneo, 620, 653, 655

—CRUISER DIVISIONS: 9th, 334, 12th, 334

—DESTROYER SQUADRONS: 4th, 124, 141, 151, 330, 21st, 290

—MARINE CORPS, 116; in Solomons, 120-2, 130, 136, 150, 156-7, 161-3, 226, 228, 231, 289; at Cape Gloucester, 345; in Marshalls, 364; in Marianas, 460; at Okinawa, 606. *1st Div*, 116, 333, 342, 346, 487-8. *2nd Div*, 348. *4th Regt*, 381. *7th Regt*, 226, 344. See also AMERICAN AIR FORCES

—MINESWEEPING AND HYDROGRAPHIC GROUP, 496,

## AMERICAN NAVY—continued

500-1, 579; in Philippines, 503, 580, 583, 587, 593

—PT BOATS, 290, 327-8, 522

—SEABEES, 367, 378

—TRANSPORT GROUPS AND SQUADRONS, in Solomons, 125-6, 129, 132, 137; in Philippines, 577-8, 586

*Amiral Pierre*, French ship, 189-90

*Ammen*, US destroyer, 342, 369-70, 373-6, 380-1, 395, 400, 406, 417n, 421-2, 426, 431, 443, 461-3, 480-1, 485, 536

*Ammiraglio Cagni*, Italian submarine, 355

AMMUNITION, expended in bombardment of Guam, 444n, of Balikpapan, 648

AMOY, 479, 599

*Anaconda*, HMAS, 698

ANAMBAS ISLANDS, 317

ANATO ISLAND, 337

ANDAMAN ISLANDS (Sketch p. 11), 12-13, 23, 59, 126, 127n, 351, 359-60, 397, 401, 465n, 467

ANDERSEN, AB N. W., 584n

*Anderson*, US destroyer, 9, 43n

ANDERSON, Rear-Adm Bern, 404, 425, 427

ANDERSON, WO H. S., 67

ANDERSON, Sir John, 671

ANDERSON, General Sir Kenneth, 199

ANDERSON, Lt W. F., 213

*Andes*, British transport, 37n

*Andrea Doria*, Italian battleship, 312

ANDRESEN, Sub-Lt A. M., 278, 331

ANDREW, Lt R. T., 71

ANDREWARTH, Cdr E. M., 166, 240; comds *Burnie*,

550-1, 613, 684

ANGAUR ISLAND, 488

*Anglo Maersk*, British tanker, 63

*Angola*, Portuguese ship, 694

*Anhui*, British ship, 269n

*Anna Knudsen*, Norwegian tanker, 356

ANNEAR, AB J., 584n

ANNET, Monsieur, 187, 189

*Anshun*, British ship, 171-2, 260n, 327

ANSON PASSAGE, 641

ANVIL OPERATION, 448-50

ANZAC AREA, 4-6, 8, 34-5

ANZAC FORCE, 4, 8-10, 34

ANZAC SQUADRON, 34, 101

ANZIO, 446-50

*Aoba*, Japanese cruiser, 6, 40, 113n, 141-2, 227-8,

388, 426, 429, 434, 435n; sunk, 665

AQABA, GULF OF, 15

*Aquarius*, US transport, 501n

*Aquitania*, British transport, 36-7, 287

ARABIA, 204, 298, 314, 316, 359

ARABIAN SEA (Sketch p. 356), 3, 202, 205, 354-5, 357,

386

ARAFURA SEA (Map p. 263), 212, 288

ARAKAN, 351, 558-61, 565-6, 568, 570

*Ararat*, Australian corvette, 436n, 541n; commis-

sioned, 295; New Guinea area, 542-3

*Arare*, Japanese destroyer, 14n

*Arashi*, Japanese destroyer, 167, 172, 260n; sunk, 290

*Arashio*, Japanese destroyer, 270n, 271-2

*Arawa*, British transport, 692-3

ARAWA (Sketch p. 339), 335, 341-2, 344, 346, 482,

490, 492; operations at, 338-40

ARBUTHNOT, Adm Sir Geoffrey, 20

ARCHANGEL, 16n, 107, 250-1

*Archbishop Lamy*, US ship, 253

ARCHER, F. P., 7

ARCHER, Capt G. R., 340

ARCTIC OCEAN, 360-1

*Argonaut*, British cruiser, 201, 572

ARGONAUT CONFERENCE, 616

*Argonne*, US fleet auxiliary, 121

*Argus*, British aircraft carrier, 2, 90-1

*Ariadne*, British minelayer, 480, 489, 495, 501, 507,

629

*Ariake*, Japanese destroyer, 40

ARIGA, Rear-Adm, 610

ARISON, Capt. R. E., 645

ARLIS, Vice-Adm S. H., 60, 91, 94, 188, 560

*Armidade*, Australian corvette, 550n; Timor, 214-17;

loss of, 218-22, 709; casualties, 711

ARMSTRONG, Cdre J. M., 155n; NOIC New Guinea,

438, 490, 492; comds *Australia*, 513, 592

- ARNOLD, Gen H. H., 171  
*Aronda*, British transport, 185*n*  
*Arrow*, British destroyer, 208  
 ARTHUR, Brig A. E., 634  
 ARU ISLANDS (Map p. 263), 180*n*, 211-13, 264, 266  
 ARUNDEL ISLAND, 290  
*Arunta*, Australian destroyer, 211, 503*n*; in eastern Australian waters, 62-3, 77, 101, 241; commissioned, 104; sinks *RO.33*, 160; New Guinea area, 166-74, 181-2, 240, 247, 345, 400, 406, 417*n*, 421-2, 426-7, 430-1, 433, 442-3, 461-3, 630-1; Timor, 224; in Task Force 74, 288, 290, 295, 330, 334; escorts damaged *Hobart*, 292; New Britain, 337, 342-3; refits, 369-70, 602-3, 656, 676; Admiralty Islands, 376-8, 500; Morotai, 480-1, 485; Philippines, 495, 509, 513, 522, 524-5, 527, 534-5, 579, 582-3, 585, 589, 591-3, 596, 599; conditions experienced in 1943-44, 536-7; Borneo, 637, 639-44, 649-51, 654; casualties, 711  
*Asagiri*, Japanese destroyer, 10*n*, 14*n*; sunk, 164  
*Asagumo*, Japanese destroyer, 270-2, 435*n*, 517, 523; sunk, 524-5, 528, 532*n*  
*Asanagi*, Japanese destroyer, 10, 40, 120  
*Asashio*, Japanese destroyer, 270*n*, 272  
*Ascott*, British ship, 382*n*, 386  
*Ashanti*, British destroyer, 445  
 ASHIBE, PO Namori, 67  
*Ashigara*, Japanese cruiser, 499, 519, 523, 528, 540; sunk, 640  
 Ashton, Maj L. E., 342  
 ASIA ISLAND, 483, 489  
*Asphalion*, British ship, 383  
 ASSAM, 22, 351  
*Assault*, HMAS, 171, 277  
 ASSER, CPO H. E. B., 224  
 ASSMANN, Vice-Adm K., 27*n*  
*Aster*, British corvette, 206  
*Astoria*, US cruiser, 9, 42-3, 121, 125, 130, 137-9; loss of, 147, 153  
*Atago*, Japanese cruiser, 14, 234, 457, 498, 517; sunk, 518  
*Athelstane*, British naval auxiliary ship, 20-1  
*Athlone Castle*, British transport, 185*n*  
*Atlanta*, US cruiser, 121, 230-2; sunk, 233  
 ATLANTIC OCEAN (Map p. 83), 1-2, 4-5, 35, 37, 59-60, 63, 127, 191, 193, 197-8, 228-9, 251, 277, 292, 354, 387; German submarine operations in, 207-10  
 ATOMIC BOMB, 670-4, 703  
 ATROCITIES, 386, 388-90, 392*n*  
*Attacker*, British aircraft carrier, 380, 450  
 ATTLEE, Rt Hon Earl, 350, 669, 676  
 ATTU ISLAND (Map p. 83), 81, 87  
 AUCHINCLECK, Field Marshal Sir Claude, 38-9, 90, 112  
 AUCKLAND, 28, 63, 113  
*Augusta*, US cruiser, 672  
*Aurora*, British cruiser, 201, 311*n*  
*Aust*, Norwegian ship, 198  
*Australia*, Australian cruiser, 4, 9-10, 43, 103-4, 292, 377, 536, 656; in Task Force 44, 34, 41, 74, 113, 161-2, 165, 287-8, 291, 295, 334, 381; Coral Sea Battle, 47, 49-50, 53; eastern Australian waters, 101; Solomons offensive, 121, 124-5, 128-9, 132, 136-9, 150, 153-4; New Guinea, 173, 330, 400, 402, 404, 406, 417*n*, 421, 426, 429, 431-2, 435, 442-3, 461, 500; New Britain, 342-3; refits, 369-70, 380, 462-3; Morotai, 480-1, 485; Philippines operations, 495, 506, 509, 511-13, 579, 582-6, 589-90, 592-3, 596*n*; casualties, 711  
 AUSTRALIA (Map p. 678; Sketch p. 33), 3, 24, 32-4, 39, 50, 58, 104-5, 108, 110, 114, 121, 262, 317, 391, 410, 465, 468; in Allied strategy, 1-2, 5, 106-7; MacArthur's views on danger from Japan, 31; shipbuilding program, 35; Curtin on dangers of invasion, 55; defence of, 56, 186-7, 190; Japanese submarines attack coastal shipping, 61, 78-9, 158, 251-6; institutes coastal convoys, 77; so-called "isolationist attitude" examined, 100; security assured by Coral Sea and Midway Battles, 108; sea communications, 112, 184; combined operational training of naval officers and men begun, 277; as base for British naval forces, 391, 469-70, 475-6; further military commitments limited by manpower, 667; wishes to take part in occupation of Japan, 676-7  
 AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE, 39*n*, 42, 54, 100-1, 114, 118, 167, 185*n*, 212, 218, 222, 237, 264-5, 271, 405-6, 466, 487, 490-1, 553, 556, 624, 649, 651, 666-7, 676; escorts Australian convoys, 253, 257; strength in 1944, 470-1; air sea rescue work, 554-5; aerial minelaying, 661; command reverts to Air Board, 682  
 —FIRST TACTICAL AIR FORCE, 622, 651  
 —WINGS: No. 62 Works, 405-6; No. 71, 462-3, 626, 633  
 —SQUADRONS: No. 7, 76; No. 7 Mobile Works, 405-6; No. 22, 246; No. 32, 134; No. 75, 406  
 AUSTRALIAN ARMY, 37, 42, 97, 100, 114, 185, 211-13, 267, 363, 482, 645, 676, 685-6, 696-7, 699; New Guinea operations, 170, 246, 264, 268-9, 326, 332, 345-6, 440; affected by manpower problems, 466; strength in 1944, 470-1; in proposed British Commonwealth Force, 666-7; command reverts to C-in-C, 682  
 —ARMIES: First, 492, 625  
 —CORPS: I, 619, 647, 688, II, 633-4, 686  
 —DIVISIONS, INFANTRY: 3rd, 490, 493, 5th, 490-2, 625-7, 6th, 12, 490, 493, 625-30, 632-3, 690, 7th, 109, 327, 646-8, 650-2, 655, 657, 687, 700, 8th, 677, 692-3, 9th, 187, 200, 287, 326-8, 619, 625, 637, 641, 655, 11th, 327, 699  
 —FORCES: *Buckforce*, 657, *Florida Force*, 630, 632, *Gull Force*, 696-8, *Lancer Force*, 214, 216, 222-4, *Milne Force*, 118, *New Guinea Force*, 236-8, 240-1, 244*n*, 268, *Northern Territory Force*, 177, 214, *Plover Force*, 180, *Sparrow Force*, 177, 213-14  
 —ARTILLERY: 343, 651, 655, 2/5th Fd Regt, 242  
 —CAVALRY: 2/7th Cav (Cdo) Regt, 651  
 —ENGINEERS: 620, 622, 651  
 —INDEPENDENT COMPANIES: 2/2nd, 176, 178, 214-15, 221, 2/4th, 177-8  
 —INFANTRY: *Brigades*, 6th, 490, 627, 7th, 118, 8th, 437-8, 11th, 490, 14th, 63, 16th, 12, 628, 17th, 12, 286, 18th, 247, 19th, 628, 20th, 329, 637-8, 21st, 700, 23rd, 493, 24th, 637-8, 26th, 619, 33rd, 698, *Battalions*: 2/8th, 632, 2/9th, 245-6, 436, 650, 2/10th, 175, 246, 2/12th, 182, 247, 2/13th, 643, 2/17th, 346, 2/24th, 621, 2/27th, 650, 2/31st, 700, 2/48th, 621, 30th, 436-8, 35th, 440, 36th, 493, 627, 57th/60th, 437, *Papuan Inf*, 437, 440  
 —MACHINE GUN AND PIONEER BATTALIONS: 2/1st MG, 651, 2/1st Pnr, 657, 2/4th Pnr, 689  
 —MEDICAL CORPS: 2/12th Fd Amb, 259  
 —NEW GUINEA ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT, 116, 237, 285, 340, 440  
 —SERVICE CORPS: 259  
 AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT, 12, 56, 58, 110, 178, 292, 466, 694; announces appointment of MacArthur as Supreme Commander SWPA, 31; concurs in definition of Pacific and SWP Areas, 32; authority conferred on MacArthur, 34, 54; views on threat from Japan, 55-6; seeks concentration of Allied naval forces in Pacific, 185-6; requests return of 9 Aust Div from Middle East, 187; reaction to "Beat Hitler First" policy, 353; command of Australian Squadron, 380; and naval manning problem, 465; proposed strength of RAN in 1944, 472; Churchill's proposal to form British Commonwealth Force, 666-7; question of command in SWPA, 667; reserves right to determine nature and extent of war effort, 668  
 —ADVISORY WAR COUNCIL, 55, 108-10, 186, 223*n*, 251-3, 257, 274-5, 287, 419, 469, 471-2, 667  
 —CHIEFS OF STAFF, 31, 107-8, 471, 666-7  
 —COMMERCE DEPARTMENT, 257  
 —DEFENCE COMMITTEE, 471  
 —JOINT ADMINISTRATIVE PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE, 476  
 —WAR CABINET, 54*n*, 380, 466-7, 470-2, 476*n*, 676-7  
 AUSTRALIAN NAVY, 34, 54, 67, 73-4, 252, 302, 417*n*, 553, 675, 682; strength and distribution, 4, 101, 185*n*, 294-5, 393*n*, 466, 470-2, 710; deployment, 100-1; rates of pay, 101-2; recruit training, 101; victualling, 102-3, 104; shipbuilding for, 104; manufacture of munitions for, 104-5; versus submarines, 203; in northern Australian waters, 211; Gen Blamey's criticisms, 243-4; in Lilliput operation, 269; escort work, 283-4, 392-5; in Coral Sea, 286; cruiser strength, 292; in Mediterranean,

AUSTRALIAN NAVY—*continued*

- 312; relations with RN and USN, 314, 434-5; in 1943-44 NG offensive, 326, 378-9, 436; with Eastern Fleet, 354, 382, 392-5; senior appointments in, 380; in DEMS, 393n, 706-7; representation at Normandy, 445; in Philippines, 480, 489, 536; work of small ships, 541; at Okinawa, 614; at Wewak, 628-33; in BCOF, 666-7; achievements, 702-5; casualties, 707, 711-13; work of RAN personnel with RN, 714-17  
 —NAVAL BOARD, 8, 155, 158, 177, 181, 193, 212-14, 219, 221, 223, 236-7, 260n, 267, 283, 318, 465, 471, 537, 550, 556, 675, 695, 698; suspends merchant ship sailings, 77; development of Aust bases, 105; composition, 106; Timor operations, 222; command of Aust Navy reverts to, 682; establishes nucleus of minesweeping fleet, 708  
 —NAVY OFFICE, MELBOURNE, 160n, 218, 549, 551, 593, 702; on suitability of corvettes for escort duty, 394; notified of Germany's surrender, 615; orders cease offensive action, 674  
 —AUSTRALIA STATION, 62, 197, 550; Aust ships on, Jun 1942, 101; strength in Oct 1943, 466; submarine attacks on, 556  
 —AUSTRALIAN SQUADRON, 101, 477, 536, 625, 655, 681; composition, 4; in Solomons, 121; redesignated TF.74, 276-7; command of, 434, 441; victualling of, 537; in Philippines, 656, 676. *See also* ANZAC SQUADRON, TASK FORCE 44  
 —DIRECTORATE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE, 122, 161, 238, 240, 286, 317-18, 379n  
 —BEACH UNIT, 620, 623-4, 641, 654, 689  
 —FLINDERS NAVAL DEPOT, 101, 103-4  
 —HISTORICAL RESEARCH SECTION, 102n  
 —HYDROGRAPHIC BRANCH, 239, 243, 509, 620-1, 638-9, 649-50  
 —MINELAYING AND SWEEPING, 677, 701, 20th MS Flotilla, 549-51, 708; 21 MSF, 301, 304, 314, 445, 549-52, 571-3, 614, 684, 709; 22 MSF, 301-2, 445, 549-51, 614, 684, 709; 24 MSF, 265, 549, 550n, 708-9. MS Groups, 549n. 1st Minelaying Flotilla, 628  
 —NAVAL BOMBARDMENT GROUP, 655  
 —NAVAL COLLEGE, 441, 536  
 —NURSING SERVICE, rates of pay, 102; strength, 466, 710; casualties, 711  
 —SURVEY GROUP, 326-7, 480  
 —WOMEN'S ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVAL SERVICE, 102, 466  
*Autolycus*, British ship, 22n  
 AVERY, AB C. R., 584n  
 AVON, Lord, *see* EDEN, Rt Hon Sir Anthony  
 Ayanami, Japanese destroyer, 12n, 234-5  
 Ayatosa Maru, Japanese transport, 120  
 Aylwin, US destroyer, 43n  
 AZOV, SEA OF, 1, 53  
 BABELTHUAP ISLAND, 395  
 BABIANG, 436  
 BABO, 39, 410  
 Bache, US destroyer, 342, 370, 372, 375, 377, 381, 400, 417n, 422, 426, 431, 461-3, 480-1, 495, 503n, 524  
 BACK, AB R. F., 574  
 BADGER, Rear-Adm O. C., 679  
 BADOGLIO, Marshal, 308, 310-11  
 Bagley, US destroyer, 124, 138, 142n, 146, 153, 161, 165, 173-4, 241, 287-8, 330, 338  
 Bahadur, British ship, 22n  
 Bahrain, Panamanian tanker, 204  
 BALABAC STRAIT, 517, 600, 637-9, 641-2  
 BALI (Sketch p. 320), 193, 319, 324, 548  
 Balikpapan, Netherlands ship, 240, 269n, 281  
 BALIKPAPAN (Sketch p. 618), 192, 317, 414, 618-19, 633, 665, 687-8, 700; plans for attack on, 636, 644, 647-8; described, 646; operations at, 649-58  
 BALIKPAPAN BAY, 646-7  
 BALLALE, 279, 282-3  
 Ballarat, Australian corvette, 295n, 696; Anzac Area, 35; New Guinea, 116, 174, 240, 244-6, 249, 269, 436; eastern Australian waters, 255-7; 20th MS Flotilla, 549n, 21st MS Flotilla, 550; Pacific, 572; at surrender in Tokyo Bay, 680; Hong Kong, 684  
 Balus, trading vessel, 42  
 BAN, Sub-Lt Katsuhisa, 67  
 Bancroft, US Destroyer, 638  
 BAND, Lt-Cdr J. M., 327  
 BANDAR ABAS, 204-6, 394  
 BANDAR SHAPUR, 203, 357  
 BANDJERMASIN (Sketch p. 320), 636, 649, 700  
 Bandon, Air Chief Marshal the Earl of, 567  
 BANG, Capt. A. G., 78  
 BANGKOK, 351, 359  
 Banjoewangi, Netherlands ship, 22n  
 Bantam, Netherlands ship, 63, 166n, 240, 269n, 280  
 BARBEY, Vice-Adm Daniel E., 171, 277-8, 285, 327-8, 335, 338-9, 343-4, 369-71, 374, 377, 396, 400, 402-3, 408, 415, 481-2, 486, 489, 494-5, 501, 507-8, 510, 513, 576-9, 588-9, 620, 647, 651, 654  
 Barcoo, Australian frigate, 541n; New Guinea, 436, 439-40; New Britain, 492, 625; Borneo, 620-3, 638-9, 641, 644; at Ambon surrender, 696-7; Mili Island, 699; Macassar and Bandjermasin, 700  
 Barfleur, British destroyer, 664, 674  
 BARLING, Lt-Cdr A. D., 116, 244  
 BARLOW, Sqn Ldr G. W., 405  
 Barnes, US aircraft carrier, 689  
 Barnett, US transport, 152  
 BARNETT, OD J. S. W., 571n  
 BARON, AB C., 291n  
 Barr, US transport, 679  
 BARRETT, Lt F. A., 336  
 BARRON, Lt-Cdr E. J.; comds Warrnambool, 180-1, 212, Launceston, 573, 685  
 BARROWCLOUGH, Maj-Gen Rt Hon Sir Harold, 367  
 Bartolomeu Dias, Portuguese sloop, 694  
 Barton, US destroyer, 233  
 Barwon, Australian ship, 75-6  
 BASILAN STRAIT, 600, 639  
 Basilisk, HMAS, 268, 284  
 BASILISK PASSAGE, 168  
 Basque, French destroyer, 301n  
 BASRA, 3, 203, 357  
 BASS STRAIT, 551, 574  
 Bataan, Australian destroyer, 466; Subic Bay, 656, 676; at surrender in Tokyo Bay, 680; transports Australian prisoners, 681-2  
 BATAAN PENINSULA, 596-7  
 Batavia, Netherlands ship, 22n  
 BATAVIA (Sketch p. 320), 197, 317, 384n, 387, 548-9, 636  
 BATES, Maj C. D., 336, 441n  
 BATES, PO H. E., 393n  
 Bathurst, Australian corvette; East Indies Station, 35n; with Eastern Fleet, 101, 185, 295n; service of, 203; Persian Gulf, 206; Indian Ocean, 394; in 20th MS Flotilla, 549n; Hong Kong, 684-5  
 BATHURST ISLAND, 213, 218-19  
 BATJAN, 434-5, 453  
 BATTLEAXE OPERATION, 490, 492, 625  
 BATTLE LINE, 528  
 Battler, British aircraft carrier, 386-7  
 BAYLEY, Lt H. B., 513n  
 BEAKE, AB F., 584n  
 Beale, US destroyer, 370, 372, 375, 377, 380-1, 395, 400, 417n, 426, 431, 461-3, 480-1, 495, 500, 503n, 524-5  
 BEASLEY, Rt Hon J. A., 252-3  
 "BEAT HITLER FIRST" POLICY, 8, 25n, 34, 56, 274, 465  
 BEAVIS, Maj-Gen L. E., 688n  
 BECHER, Rear-Adm O. H., comds Quickmatch, 552, 604, 606-7  
 BECO, 176, 213-14  
 Bedouin, British destroyer, 93  
 Begum, British escort carrier, 547  
 Behar, British ship, 388-90  
 Behrens, C. B. A., 15n, 26n, 35n, 36n  
 BEIRUT, 97, 314  
 Belfast, British cruiser, 360-1  
 Bell, US destroyer, 639, 655  
 Benalla, Australian corvette, 295n, 436n; Kiriwina, 285; New Guinea, 326-7; Admiralty Islands, 378; Leyte, 535; at Koepang surrender, 693  
 Bendigo, Australian corvette, 295n, 436n, 541n; Anzac Area, 35; New Guinea, 174-5, 269; eastern Australian waters, 254, 257; 21st MS Flotilla, 550; Pacific, 573; Hong Kong, 684  
 BENDIGO, 72, 105  
 Bengal, Indian corvette, 104n, 193-6, 204, 357, 707

- BENGAL, BAY OF (Sketches pp. 17, 192), 12, 14, 18, 21-3, 60, 89, 126-7, 314, 316, 351, 357, 359, 362, 364, 386-7, 463, 467-8, 473, 479*n*; Allied shipping losses in, 29; Japanese Navy operations, 185, 202, 210
- BENGHAZI (Sketch p. 94), 89, 299, 304
- Benham*, US destroyer, 235
- BENNETT, Lt Cdr H. A., 177-9
- BENNETTS, CWO J. R., 168
- Bennion*, US destroyer, 581
- BENSON, Capt C., 256
- BENSON, Capt S. J., 491, 552
- BERGAMINI, Adm, 311
- BERGE, Lt J. S., 327*n*
- BERKEY, Vice-Adm Russell S., 342, 369-72, 377, 381, 400, 403-4, 415, 421, 426, 430, 442, 480-1, 485-6, 495, 500-1, 510, 513-14, 522, 524-5, 528-9, 536, 577, 579, 592, 594, 596-7, 600, 603, 620-2, 637, 639, 642, 651, 655
- BERKSTRESSER, Pte, 161
- BERRY, AB E. P., 393*n*
- BERRYMAN, Lt-Gen Sir Frank, 331*n*, 655, 677, 688*n*
- BERRYMAN, AB M., 319
- Berwickshire*, British ship, 547
- Beryl II*, HMAS, 708
- Besugo*, US submarine, 387*n*, 548
- BETANO, 176-8, 181, 213-18, 221
- BETANO BAY, 178-9
- BETIO ISLAND, 343*n*, 348
- BETZLER, J. E., 355*n*, 382*n*
- BEVIN, Rt Hon Ernest, 292
- BEY, Rear-Adm, 361
- Bhutan*, British ship, 91
- BIAK ISLAND (Sketch p. 421), 410-13, 415-16, 441-3, 453, 483, 489, 541; operations at, 420-36
- Bicester*, British destroyer, 202
- Bienville*, US ship, 22*n*
- Bingera*, Australian anti-submarine vessel, 75, 77*n*; in midjet submarine raid on Sydney Harbour, 66, 70-1
- BINMALEY, 589-90
- Birchgrove Park*, HMAS, 698
- BIR HACHEIM, 2, 38, 90
- BIRKLAND, Capt H., 542-3
- Birmingham*, British cruiser, 60, 80, 93, 187-9, 519
- BIRT'S BUOY, 70
- BISCAY, BAY OF, 63, 207, 355
- Bishopdale*, Australian oiler, 497, 539
- BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO (Sketch p. 43), 4, 8, 33, 37, 42, 100, 112-14, 267*n*, 279, 284, 334, 365-8, 370-80, 398
- BISMARCK SEA, BATTLE OF, 270-3
- BIZERTA, 201, 299, 307, 311, 445
- BLACK, Capt G. B., 491
- Black Prince*, British cruiser, 572, 664
- BLACK SEA, 1, 107, 309
- Black Snake*, Australian tender, 689
- BLAIKIE, Lt-Cdr J. A., 445*n*, 714
- BLAIS, Major, 343
- BLAMEY, Field Marshal Sir Thomas, 126, 181, 237, 245, 247, 284, 318, 331, 619, 651, 693, 699; seeks destroyer escort for Lilliput ships, 240-1; criticizes navy cooperation, 242-4; plans capture of Lae, 326-7; discussions with British Chiefs of Staff, 470; plans for attack on Wewak, 627; at Japanese surrenders, 677, 681, 688-9
- BLANDY, Rear-Adm W. H. P., 598
- Blankney*, British destroyer, 307
- BLECKMAN, Lt-Cdr J. F., 632
- BLIGHT, Stoker L. J., 94*n*
- BLISS, Sgt A. D., 336
- Block Island*, US aircraft carrier, 649
- Blowfly*, Australian motor boat, 601
- Blue*, US destroyer, 124, 138, 141, 152, 163, 227
- Bluefish*, US submarine, 414*n*, 453
- Blue Ridge*, US amphibious force command ship, 501, 507, 509, 512, 514, 521*n*, 527, 531, 534
- BODE, Capt H. D., 68, 139
- BOGADJIM, 399, 437
- BOGAN, Rear-Adm G. F., 518-19
- BOHOL ISLAND, 521-2, 602-3
- BOIKEN, CAPE, 628-9
- Boise*, US cruiser, 227-8, 311*n*, 369-70, 375, 381, 400, 402, 417*n*, 426, 429, 431-2, 480-1, 495, 503*n*, 509, 522, 526, 535, 579, 583, 586, 597, 600, 620, 640, 642
- BOLERO OPERATION, 111
- Bombay*, Indian corvette, 65, 70, 77*n*, 204
- BOMBAY (Sketch p. 17), 15, 19, 204-5, 298, 354, 357, 382, 561; disaster at, 393-4
- Bombo*, HMAS, 693
- BONE, 201-2, 299
- Bonefish*, US submarine, 415*n*
- BONIFACIO, STRAIT OF, 446
- BONIN ISLANDS (Sketch p. 33), 479, 575
- Bontekoe*, Netherlands ship, 63, 116, 166*n*, 240*n*, 269
- BORDEAUX, 197, 296, 387, 430
- BORGEN BAY, 341-2, 344
- BORNEO (Sketches pp. 618, 680), 317-18, 321-2, 324, 414-15, 475, 481, 517, 600, 611, 619-21, 625, 659, 668, 677, 682; plans for attack on, 468-9, 616-18; operations in, 636-58
- BORNEO, DUTCH, 687-8
- BORONGA ISLANDS (Sketch p. 563), 559, 565-7
- BORRETT, Capt J. T., 292
- BOSNEK, 420-2, 427
- BOSTOCK, AVM W. D., 620, 637, 654, 677
- Both*, Netherlands ship, 166*n*, 240*n*, 269*n*, 696
- BOUGAINVILLE (Sketches pp. 48, 634), 7, 37, 42, 44-5, 113, 132, 134-5, 150, 156, 247, 249, 276, 278-9, 283-4, 330-1, 346, 398, 412, 436, 482, 490, 493, 577, 625, 694-5; coastwatchers, 122-3, 133, 136, 231, 232, 332-3; operations on, 334, 633-4, 659; Japanese surrender, 686-7
- BOUGAINVILLE STRAIT, 134-5, 634
- BOULTON, Lt-Cdr A. N., 684
- BOURKE, AB J. T. H., 584*n*
- BOVILL, Lt-Cdr J. S., 72*n*
- Bowen*, Australian corvette, 104*n*, 295*n*, 436*n*; Lilliput operation, 269*n*, 280, 283; in 24th MS Flotilla, 550*n*; Menado, 699
- BOYCE, PO H. R., 393*n*
- BOYD, Adm Sir Denis, 13
- BOYD, CPO E. A. G., 482*n*
- BOYE, Mrs Ruby O., 123
- BOYLE, Lt-Cdr J. C. P., 301, 550
- BRACEGIRDLE, Cdr W. S., 526
- BRACKENBRIDGE, Lt A. B., 550
- BRADLEY'S HEAD (Map p. 69), 68, 70-1
- BRADY, Mr, 75*n*
- BRADY, Tel J. R., 624*n*
- BRAGADIN, M. A., 89*n*
- BRAIN, H. G., 106
- Braine*, US destroyer, 596
- Brake*, German tanker, 386-7
- Bramble*, British minesweeper, 250
- BRANSON, Capt G. C. F., 240, 281-4, 326-9
- Bream*, US submarine, 519*n*
- BREMNER, AB R. H., 393*n*
- Brenda Matthews*, US ship, 378
- BRENNECKE, J., 193*n*
- BREW, Major, 282
- BRIDGE, Lt K. W. T., 286, 332
- BRINDAL, AB C. J., 393*n*
- BRINDISI, 313, 446
- BRISBANE (Sketch p. 255), 42, 52, 76-7, 104*n*, 121, 124, 165, 170-1, 173, 257-9, 261, 277*n*, 330, 349, 370-1, 493, 547, 549*n*, 550, 572, 699
- BRITAIN, GREAT (Map p. 452), 1, 25, 29-30, 32, 34, 37-8, 111-12, 275, 299, 304, 359, 465-8; shipping losses, 26, 35-6, 249; plans for invasion of Europe, 309; seeks participation in invasion of Japan, 666-9; failure of German blockade against, 704
- BRITISH AIR FORCE, 2, 39, 92-3, 109, 201, 206, 354, 401-2, 444, 548, 554, 661
- SQUADRONS: No. 11, 20; No. 30, 17; No. 244, 356; No. 258, 17; No. 261, 20; No. 621, 392; No. 873, 20
- BRITISH ARMY, 10, 12, 14, 89-90, 109, 199, 311-12, 444, 446-7, 599, 659
- ARMIES: *First*, 201; *Eighth*, 97-8, 184, 187, 200, 299, 305, 311, 445, 447-8; *Fourteenth*, 558, 565, 567, 659
- CORPS: *X*, 97, 445; *XV*, 559, 562, 567
- DIVISIONS: 2nd, 558; 50th, 92; 70th, 12
- BRIGADES: 3rd Cdo, 559, 562-3, 565; 16th Inf, 12; 29th Inf, 187; Chindits, 351-2, 558
- British Chivalry*, British ship, 382*n*, 386
- BRITISH COMMONWEALTH FORCE, 666-8
- British Fusilier*, British tanker, 561

- BRITISH GOVERNMENT, 14, 31-2, 101, 107, 465-6, 475, 665, 694; requests US aid in Atlantic, 4-5; agrees to "Beat Hitler First" strategy, 106; opposed to cross-Channel invasion of France, 111-12; plans to occupy Madagascar, 187; transfers *Shropshire* to Australia, 292; seeks participation in Pacific operations, 472-3; and atomic research, 670-1
- ADMIRALTY, 18-19, 34-5, 38, 59, 74, 90, 97, 103-4, 126, 190, 203-4, 208, 251, 260n, 297-8, 355, 358, 360-1, 363, 384, 386, 388, 391, 393, 445, 476, 550, 561, 573, 613, 615, 683, 708; and US request for assistance in Pacific, 190; on role of British Navy in Pacific, 364; proposals for bases in Australia, 105-6, 469; offers ships to Australia, 472; orders cessation of hostilities against Japan, 675, 702
- BRITISH CHIEFS OF STAFF, 12-13, 186, 200, 260, 309, 387, 446, 449-50, 470, 618, 659-60, 669; "Beat Hitler First" policy, 352-3, 359; view on Pacific and Far East strategy, 362-4, 468; on use of British fleet in Pacific, 465-7, 473-4, 666; do not favour Borneo operations, 617; proposed formation of British Commonwealth Force, 668
- DOMINIONS OFFICE, 105
- FOREIGN OFFICE, 258, 364, 467-8
- PRODUCTION, MINISTRY OF, 470
- WAR CABINET, 13, 38, 107, 350
- British Lord*, British tanker, 385
- British Loyalty*, British tanker, 65, 73
- BRITISH NAVY, 29, 39, 96n, 105, 358, 471-2, 480, 556, 677; in Middle East and Indian Ocean, 5, 12, 60, 202; demands of B. of Atlantic on, 12; shortages of AS escort vessels, 35; attacks Diego Suarez, 42; US requests aid of, 59-60; victualling in, 102-3; lacks night fighting training, 154; in East Africa, 297-8; proposed role in Pacific, 363-4, 380, 465, 467, 475-6; proposed base in Australia, 391, 470; invasion of Normandy, 444-5; attacks Elba, 448; Anvil operation, 450; and US Navy, 451; RAN personnel with, 466, 714-17; achievements, 702-5; casualties among personnel serving with RAN, 711-13
- STATIONS: *East Indies*, 35, 104, 203, 297, 359, 386, *Mediterranean*, 91n, *South Atlantic*, 15, 209, 292, 296-7, 354, 359
- FLEETS: *Eastern*, 13, 79, 81, 89, 127, 190, 197, 203, 206, 208, 251, 296, 314, 359, 464n, 476-7, 479n, 550, 554, 556, 559, 561, 570, 660, 708; strength and deployment, 4, 12, 15-16, 22, 89-90, 97, 107-8, 185-6, 191, 209-10, 297, 358, 363-4, 387, 560; Japanese air attack on, 18-19; in Diego Suarez attack, 60; Australian ships with, 101, 203-4, 295, 354, 466; seeks development of Aust bases, 105, 465; diversionary attacks in Bay of Bengal, 126, 396-7, 401-2; submarine arm reinforced, 355-7; US reinforcement of, 391; role of 392-3, 467; attacks Surabaya, 416-19; attacks Sabang and the Nicobar Islands, 463-4, 505; attacks Sumatra, 471-2, *East Indies*, 477, 568, 669, 683, *Home*, 5, 191, *Mediterranean*, 26, 30, 80-1, 89, 97, 147, 222, 317, 581; strength, 2, 90; gains bases in southern Italy, 446, *Pacific*, 366, 551, 570, 577, 613-14, 616-17, 626, 662, 666, 701, 709; strength and employment, 366, 465n, 469; formation, 473-4, 476-7, 572-4; minesweeper requirements, 550; fleet train, 554; attacks Sumatran oil installations, 571-2; arrives Manus, 602; designated TF.57, 603-4; role in Borneo ops, 611, 616-17; joins US Third Fleet, 663-5; bombards Japanese home islands, 673-4
- FORCES, 563, 565-6, 569; *A Force*, 61, 126-7, 287; composition, 185, *H Force*, 4-5; assessed, 358, *Force Q*, 201, *Force W*, 559, *Force X*, 495
- NOIC and COMMANDS: *SNOPG*, 10n, 205-6, 298, 357, 359, *Burma Coast Command*, 10, *Arakan Coastal Forces Adv Base*, 562, *NOIC Akyab*, 565
- FLEET AIR ARM, 17, 20
- AIRCRAFT CARRIER SQUADRON: 11th, 683
- BATTLE SQUADRONS: 1st, 358, 477, 3rd, 15-16, 477, 567
- CRUISER SQUADRONS: 2nd, 477, 3rd, 477, 4th, 127, 187, 477, 604, 5th, 477, 7th, 581, 12th, 201
- DESTROYER FLOTILLAS: 4th, 544, 551-2; in Pacific, 572; at Okinawa, 604, 611, 614, 7th, 60, 91, 570, 573-4, 662, 664, 674, 679; composition, 16; in
- BRITISH NAVY—continued
- Indian Ocean, 127, 358, 561; Madagascar, 188-9; Arakan, 560; Okinawa, 607, 612-14, 10th, 19, 97, 174, 176, 312, 436, 464n, 25th, 572, 604, 27th, 572, 604
- MARINES, 683
- MERCHANT SHIPS, DEFENSIVELY EQUIPPED, 706
- MINESWEEPERS: 6th *MS Flotilla*, 683
- SUBMARINE FLOTILLAS: 1st, 90, 8th, 683-4, 10th, 90, 184, 660. See also SUBMARINES
- BRITISH PHOSPHATE COMMISSION, 696
- British Sergeant*, British tanker, 20-1
- BRITISH SOLOMON ISLANDS PROTECTORATE DEFENCE FORCE, 122
- BROADHURST, Capt D. K., 213n
- BROCKSOPP, Maj J. E., 175
- BROOKE, General Sir Alan, see ALAN BROOKE, Field Marshal Viscount
- BROOKE, Surgeon-Lt G. H. B., 679n
- BROOKER, Lt N. F., 627-8, 630, 687
- BROOKETON, 639-40
- Brooks, US destroyer transport, 329n, 371, 376, 583-5
- BROOKS, Capt C. H., 296, 570
- BROOKSBANK, Cdr G. J., 286
- Broome, Australian corvette, 104n, 295n; in Anzac Area, 35; New Guinea, 245-6, 269n, 436, 441, 541n; Hong Kong, 684-5
- BROWN, Lt-Cdr C. H., 254
- BROWN, OD M.C., 584n
- BROWN, W/Engineer R. E., 291n
- BROWN, Vice-Adm Wilson, 5, 8-9, 41
- BROWN, OD W. G., 584n
- BROWNELL, Air Cmdr R. J., 677, 688n
- BROWNING, Cdr H. W. S., 201-2
- Brownson, US destroyer, 344
- BRUCE, Rt Hon Viscount, 186
- BRUCE, James, 282
- BRUNEI (Sketch p. 618), 505, 517, 636-9, 650, 660; operations at, 640-5
- BRUNEI, STATE OF (Sketch p. 618), 618, 636
- BRUNEI BAY (Sketch p. 618), 514, 517, 617-18; operations at, 636-45
- BRUNEI BLUFF, 636-45, 640-1
- BRYAN, J., 665n
- BRYANT, Sir Arthur, 184n, 200n, 299n, 351n
- BUCCANEER OPERATION, 351, 359-60, 447, 449, 463
- Buchanan, US destroyer, 130
- BUCHANAN, Capt A. E., 677n; comds *Arunta*, 376, 378, 524-5, 536-7, 582, 585, 589
- BUCHANAN, Rear-Adm H. J., 105; comds *Norman*, 297, 505, 560, *Napier*, 561, 564-6, 568, 574, 674, 679
- BUCKLAND, Sub-Lt J. R., 220
- BUCKLAND, AB M., 513n
- BUCKLEY, C., 189n
- BUCKNER, Lt-Gen S. B., 604
- BUIN (Sketch p. 634), 123, 135, 231-2, 247, 249, 279, 284
- BUKA, Sgt, 396n, 406
- BUKA ISLAND (Sketch p. 634), 6, 113-14, 118, 279, 332, 334, 366
- BUKA PASSAGE (Sketch p. 634), 7, 123, 284
- BULLOCK, Lt H. W., 506-7
- BULMER, Stoker PO J. B., 94n
- BUNA (Sketches pp. 43, 244), 6, 76, 88, 118-20, 127-8, 131, 133n, 157, 166, 181, 236, 238-47, 249, 268-9, 326-8, 338, 344, 369-70
- BUNABUN HARBOUR (Sketch p. 437), 439-40
- Bunbury, Australian corvette, 295n; New Guinea, 269n, 436n, 441, 632; in 24th *MS Flotilla*, 550n
- Bundaberg, Australian corvette, 104n; eastern Australian waters, 261; New Guinea, 436n, 438; Kuching, 689-90; Ambon, 696-7
- Bungaree, Australian minelayer, 65; eastern Australian waters, 101, 105, 550
- BUNGO STRAIT, 499, 505, 608-9
- BUNNING, Pte J. I., 396n, 406
- BUNYAN, Cdr A. V., 206n, 490; comds *Kanimbla*, 482, 484, 501n, 578, 638, 642n
- Burdekin, Australian frigate, 541n; Borneo, 620-1, 687-8; refits in Sydney, 623; at Ambon surrender, 696-7; Macassar, 700
- Burdwan, British ship, 93
- BURKE, Capt D. B., 286
- BURKE, Lt-Cdr W. H., 684
- Burma, British ship, 316

- BURMA (Sketch p. 563), 10-12, 14-15, 22-3, 56, 88, 184, 275, 350-3, 359-60, 362-4, 449, 468-9, 472-4, 669; operations in, 558-70
- BURNETT, Capt J., 124*n*
- BURNETT, Adm Sir Robert, 361
- Burnie*, Australian corvette, 203*n*, 295*n*, 573; on East Indies Station, 35*n*, 297-8; joins Eastern Fleet, 204; Indian Ocean, 357; in 20th MS Flotilla, 549*n*, 21st MS Flotilla, 550; Bass Strait, 551; Leyte, 613; Hong Kong, 684; casualties, 711
- Burns*, US destroyer, 639, 655
- BURNS, Ldg Stoker M., 94*n*
- BURRELL, Vice-Adm Sir Henry, 297*n*; comds *Norman*, 16*n*, 209, *Bataan*, 656, 681-2
- BUSCH, H., 210*n*, 382*n*, 392*n*
- Bush*, US destroyer, 342, 369-71, 373-4, 378, 381, 480-1
- BUT, 625-6, 630-2
- BUTARITARI ISLAND, 348
- BUTHIDAUNG, 559
- "BUTTON" BASE, 113
- Buttonwood*, US ship, 538
- BYRNE, Lt-Cdr C. A., comds *Warrego*, 579, 596-7, 600-1, 633
- BYRNES, J. F., 672
- Cabrilla*, US submarine, 414*n*
- CAIDIN, M., 85*n*
- CAIN, Ldg Seaman K. P., 319
- Caio Duilio*, Italian battleship, 312
- Cairns*, Australian corvette, 203*n*, 295*n*, 301, 315*n*; eastern Australian waters, 159; East Indies Station, 35*n*, 297-8; Indian Ocean, 204, 207, 393, 560; Mediterranean, 305-6, 312; Persian Gulf, 314; Pacific, 573
- CAIRNS, 224, 338, 572
- Cairo*, British anti-aircraft cruiser, 91, 93
- CAIRO, 92, 360, 448; conference at, 350, 359, 446, 465, 467-9
- CALABRIA, BATTLE OF, 581
- CALCUTTA, 15, 22, 357, 383, 548
- CALDER, Maj D. A., 343*n*
- Caldwell*, US destroyer, 638
- Caledon*, British cruiser, 15
- Caledonian Salvor*, Australian salvage ship, 635
- CALICOAN, 500
- California*, US battleship, 495, 510, 522, 528, 531, 535, 595-6
- CALIPH OPERATION, 450
- CALLABY, Gnr R. R. R., 291*n*
- CALLAGHAN, Rear-Adm D. J., 232
- CALLINAN, Lt-Col B. J., 214
- CALLOW, Lt-Cdr C. M., 438, 625
- Cambrian Salvor*, salvage tug, 543
- Cambridge*, British ship, 708
- Cambridgeshire*, British trawler, 444
- CAMERON, Sgt C. B., 544*n*
- CAMERON, Brig C. E., 437-8, 440
- CAMERON, Stoker P. J., 266
- CAMOUFLAGE, 124
- CAMPBELL, Lt A., 278-9
- CAMPBELL, Cpl A. G. P., 544*n*
- CAMPBELL, Maj H. A., 318
- CAMRANH BAY, 619
- CANADA (Map p. 678), 108*n*, 466, 470, 666
- CANADIAN ARMY, 482
- CANADIAN NAVY, 444, 450
- Canberra*, Australian cruiser, 4, 34, 41, 65, 70-1, 101, 113, 233-4, 434; modernisation deferred, 104; Solomons, 121, 124-5; in Battle of Savo Island, 137-46, 273, loss of, 150-5, 292; survivors join *Shropshire*, 293; casualties, 711
- Canberra*, Australian steamer, 75-6
- Canberra*, US heavy cruiser, 292, 503
- CANBEKRA, 72, 124, 132, 274
- CANT, Lt-Cdr G. L., comds *Maryborough*, 204, 301*n*, 693
- CANTON ISLAND, 8, 348
- CANTWELL, Lt L. J. H. 653*n*
- Cape Alexander*, US ship, 492
- Cape Edmont*, US ship, 552, 554-6
- Cape Leeuwin*, Australian tender, 596
- Capetown*, British cruiser, 204-5
- CAPTOWN (Map p. 678), 4, 104, 193, 203, 208-10, 355
- CAPE VERDE ISLANDS, 387
- CAPE YORK PENINSULA (Map p. 263), 114-15, 241
- CAPITAL OPERATION, 474
- Caradale*, Australian ship, 257
- Caradoc*, British cruiser, 205, 476-7
- CAREENING BAY, 543-4
- CAREY, Stoker PO J. V. A., 21*n*
- CAREY, Lt W. G., 544, 692*n*
- CARGILL, J., 67, 72
- CARIBBEAN SEA, 29, 207
- CARLSON, Sgt L. T. W., 336
- Carnarvon Castle*, British armed merchant cruiser, 63
- CARNE, Lt R. L., 327*n*
- CAR NICOBAR ISLAND (Sketch p. 464), 127*n*, 505
- CARO, AB R. M., 218*n*, 221*n*
- CAROLA HAVEN, 7
- CAROLINE ISLANDS (Sketch p. 33), 61, 275, 368, 371, 397-8, 410, 414
- CARPENDER, Vice-Adm A. S., 221, 223*n*, 236-7, 240-1, 331*n*; comds Seventh Fleet, 277, 286-7, 330, 335
- CARPENTARIA, GULF OF (Map p. 263), 264
- CARR, Capt L. J. P., 155*n*
- CARR, Lt-Cdr P. E., 682
- CARSE, Lt H. E., 319-22, 324-5
- CARSON, Capt. J., 168
- CARTER, Capt J. H., 371, 376
- Carter Hall*, American landing ship, 338, 342, 396, 403, 501*n*, 638, 640, 642, 654
- CASABLANCA, 199, 301; conference at, 274-6, 302-3, 350
- CASEY, Rt Hon Lord, 92, 106
- Cassin Young*, US destroyer, 610
- CASTELLORIZO ISLAND, 313-14
- Castlemaine*, Australian corvette, 171, 265, 295, 436*n*, 550*n*, 555; in Timor operations, 214-16, 218, 221-2; at Hong Kong, 684-5
- CASUALTIES, merchant ships, 262, 557; Bombay disaster, 393-4; among D.E.M.S. personnel, 707; *American*, 44; Coral Sea Battle, 51, 53; Savo Battle, 153; C. Gloucester, 345; Butaritari, 348; Betio, 348; Kwajalein, 368; Marshalls, 368-9; Admiralties, 378; New Guinea, 405, 408, 436, 443, 462; Wakde, 420; Saipan, 460; Morotai, 487; Peleliu, 488; Philippines, 534, 598, 603; Iwo Jima, 598-9; Okinawa, 610. *Australian*, in R.A.N. ships, 711-13. *Japanese*, New Guinea, 10, 183, 408-9, 443, 462; Tulagi, 44; Coral Sea Battle, 47, 51; Bismarck Sea Battle, 272; Arawe, 340; C. Gloucester, 345; Butaritari, 348; Bougainville, 367; Kwajalein, 368; Marshalls, 368-9; Admiralties, 378; Wakde, 419-20; Saipan, 460; Morotai, 487; Peleliu, 488; Philippines, 540, 598, 603; Iwo Jima, 599; Okinawa, 610
- CATLEY, OD A. E., 280*n*
- CAUCASUS, THE, 1-3, 30, 37
- Cavalla*, US submarine, 455, 458
- CAVALLERO, General, 39*n*
- CEBU (Sketch p. 580), 395, 496, 602-3
- CECICH, AB J., 259
- CELEBES (Sketch p. 33), 13, 413, 468, 483, 666-8, 682, 688
- CELEBES SEA, 453, 639, 652
- CENSORSHIP, 54-5
- Centaur*, Australian hospital ship, 257-60, 557*n*
- CENTRAL PACIFIC AREA, 276, 410, 414, 465; defined, 32; Japanese plan offensive in, 58, 414; Allied plans and strategy in, 347, 397
- Centurion*, British ship, 91, 460*n*
- CERAM, 483, 698
- Cero*, US submarine, 439
- Cessnock*, Australian corvette, 203*n*, 295*n*, 301, 315*n*, 573; on East Indies Station, 35*n*; Indian Ocean, 197, 204; Mediterranean, 305-6, 312; Persian Gulf, 314; design commended, 315; Tokyo Bay, 680; Hong Kong, 684
- Ceylon*, British cruiser, 391, 401*n*
- CEYLON (Map p. 83; Sketch p. 17), 3-4, 13-16, 19-23, 61, 81, 108, 204, 298, 314, 316, 353, 358, 381, 383, 388, 391, 401, 416-17, 419, 604, 660; reinforcement of, 12-13; return of Australian troops from, 185
- CHADWICK, Prof Sir James, 671
- CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO, 12, 193, 207, 388, 392-3
- CHALLENGER BAY, 241, 288, 404
- CHALMERS, Lt-Col F. R., 165*n*

- CHAMBERLIN, Brig-Gen S. J., 168, 331*n*, 335  
 CHAMPION, Cdr G. S. H., 327*n*, 686  
 CHAMPION, Lt I. F., comds *Laurabada*, 115-16, 239, 244-5  
 CHAMPION OPERATION, 473-4  
*Chant*, US ship, 93  
*Chanticleer*, US submarine rescue ship, 319, 325  
 CHAPMAN, Lt A. G., 684  
 CHAPMAN, Cdr A. I., 688  
 CHAPMAN, Ldg Stoker W. L., 587  
 CHAPMAN, Maj W. W., 544-6  
 CHAPMAN-WALKER, Lt-Col P. J. F., 318  
*Charlotte Schliemann*, German tanker, 382, 385, 387  
*Charon*, Australian ship, 104  
*Charrette*, US destroyer, 639, 655-6  
 CHASE, Maj-Gen W. C., 373, 375, 377  
 CHEDUBA ISLAND (Sketch p. 563), 559, 565, 568-70  
*Chenango*, US escort carrier, 400  
*Chester*, US heavy cruiser, 42-3  
*Chevalier*, US destroyer, 326  
 CHIANG KAI-SHEK, Generalissimo, 110, 350, 683  
 CHIANG KAI-SHEK, Madame, 350-1  
*Chicago*, US cruiser, 4, 9-10, 34, 39*n*, 41, 43, 47, 49-50, 64-5, 68, 70, 73, 113, 121, 124-5, 130, 132, 137-9, 142*n*, 145-6, 151-5, 165; sunk, 273  
*Chikuma*, Japanese cruiser, 13, 84, 230-1, 388, 498, 517-18, 530; sunk, 532-3  
 CHILE, 297*n*, 599  
 CHINA (Map p. 678), 108*n*, 225, 351, 359, 397, 411, 468-9, 478-9, 497, 576-7, 616, 659  
 CHINA BAY, 20  
*China Maru*, Japanese transport, 6  
*Chinampa*, Australian ketch, 212-13; casualties, 711  
 CHINA SEA, 321-3, 544  
 CHINA STRAIT, 48-50, 53, 115, 170-4, 281, 439  
 CHINDWIN RIVER, 558  
 CHINESE ARMY, 350, 352  
*Chitose*, Japanese seaplane carrier, 39-40, 163-4, 227-8, 412, 457, 498; sunk, 532  
*Chitral*, British armed merchant cruiser, 62  
 CHITTAGONG, 561-3, 566-7, 570  
*Chiyoda*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 412, 457, 498; sunk, 532, 534  
*Chloe*, Greek ship, 61, 557*n*  
 CHOISEUL BAY, 331, 633-4  
 CHOISEUL ISLAND (Sketch p. 43), 42, 135, 232*n*, 279, 633; Allied landings at, 331, 333, 634-5  
*Chokai*, Japanese cruiser, 12, 14, 113, 120, 133, 135-6, 141-3, 145, 147, 149, 150*n*, 156, 163, 233-4, 457, 498, 517-18, 530; sunk, 532*n*, 533  
 CHRISTIE, Rear-Adm R. W., 42, 121, 390-1, 413, 417, 517-18  
 CHRISTISON, General Sir Philip, 558, 567  
 CHRISTMAS ISLAND, 16  
 CHRISTY, Lt-Cdr T., 204  
 CHUMA, Lt Kenshi, 67  
*Chung Cheng*, Chinese ship, 382*n*  
 CHUNGKING, 350  
 CHURCHILL, Rt Hon Sir Winston, 1, 19*n*, 37*n*, 92, 106, 108*n*, 110-11, 187, 191, 199, 200, 249*n*, 274-5, 299, 303, 304*n*, 311, 350-2, 360, 447*n*, 466, 473, 528*n*, 669; US naval aid in Atlantic, 4; importance of Ceylon, 12; Indian independence, 14; "Beat Hitler First" policy, 34, 353, 474-5; North Africa and Mediterranean operations, 38, 112, 199-200, 302, 309, 313, 446; relations with Roosevelt, 39, 308, 450; Pacific strategy and defence of Australia, 107, 186, 190, 362-4, 465-8, 472, 475, 666-7; use of atomic bomb, 671-2  
 CIANO, Count, 39*n*, 310  
 CID HARBOR, 53  
 CITRINE, Sir Walter, 16*n*  
*City of Adelaide*, British ship, 382*n*  
*City of Athens*, British ship, 208  
*City of Calcutta*, British ship, 91  
*City of Canterbury*, British ship, 185*n*  
*City of Lille*, British transport, 185*n*  
*City of Rayville*, US ship, 708  
*City of Worcester*, British ship, 692  
*Clan MacDonald*, British transport, 185*n*  
 CLARK, Capt M. J., 296*n*, 682  
 CLARKE, AB J. J., 294*n*  
*Claxton*, US destroyer, 535  
 CLAY, Capt, 173-4  
 CLEMENS, Capt W. F. M., 122, 161-2  
*Clemson*, US fleet auxiliary, 579  
*Cleopatra*, British cruiser, 38, 91, 683, 691  
*Cleveland*, US light cruiser, 652  
 CLIFF, Lt-Cdr G. J., 716  
 CLIFFORD, OD R., 584*n*  
 CLIFT, Rev J. W., 315  
 CLIVAZ, Father, 165*n*  
 CLONCURRY, 39*n*, 114  
 CLOUDY MOUNTAINS PENINSULA, 115  
 CLOWES, Lt-Gen C. A., 166, 175  
*Coast Farmer*, US ship, 158, 557*n*  
 COASTWATCHERS, 41-2, 135, 229, 243; commissioning of, 8; organisation established in Pacific areas, 100, 238; in Solomons, 122-4, 130-3, 136, 161, 231-2, 274, 279, 284-5, 289, 309, 331-3; at Good-enough and Kitava Islands, 166; in New Britain, 334-6, 340, 341*n*, 342, 490; in New Guinea, 396, 406  
*Cobargo*, Australian ship, 66  
 COBOURG PENINSULA, 218  
 COCANADA, 22  
 COCKATOO ISLAND DOCKYARD, 72*n*, 104, 193, 253, 315*n*, 439  
 COCKBURN SOUND, 390  
 COCKPIT OPERATION, 397*n*  
 COCKRAM, AB G. K., 393*n*  
 COCOS ISLANDS, 417  
*Colac*, Australian corvette, 295*n*, 541*n*; New Guinea, 245-6, 269*n*, 436, 628-32; eastern Australian waters, 255-7; Bougainville, 633-5; casualties, 711  
 COLE, AVM A. T., 677*n*  
 COLE, Sub-Lt D. L., 601  
*Colhoun*, US destroyer transport, 164  
 COLLINS, Vice-Adm Sir John, 416, 536; comds *Shropshire*, 293, Australian Squadron, 380, 441, 443, 461-3, 480, 485-6, 495, 512, 656, 676-7; at Tokyo Bay surrender, 681  
 COLLINS, Lt-Cdr J. N., 440, 550  
 COLLINS, Lt-Cdr P. G., comds *Launceston*, 204, 383, 555  
 COLOMB, Vice-Adm P. H., 704  
 COLOMBO (Sketch p. 17), 13, 20-22, 62, 79, 126-7, 185, 191-4, 197, 203-4, 206-7, 298, 316, 354-5, 357-8, 383, 384*n*, 388, 391-2, 417, 477, 547-8, 550-1, 553-4, 565, 567-8, 570; naval facilities and shipping at, 12, 15, 16, 104; Japanese air attack on, 17-18  
*Colorado*, US battleship, 3, 275, 591, 596-7  
*Colossus*, British aircraft carrier, 683  
*Columbia*, US cruiser, 495, 522, 528, 589, 591-2, 650  
*Comara*, Australian ship, 267  
 COMBINED CHIEFS OF STAFF, 41*n*, 187, 303, 309, 447-8, 666; issue directive on naval bases in Australia, 105; report on Trident Conference, 351; agree to participation of British Fleet in main operations against Japan, 475; directive to Mountbatten, 668-9, 682  
 COMBINED OPERATIONAL SERVICES COMMAND, 237  
 COMBINED OPERATIONS INTELLIGENCE CENTRE, 41, 59*n*, 185, 229, 515  
 COMBINED OPERATIONS SCHOOL, 171  
 COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT STEAMSHIP LINE, 267*n*  
 COMMUNICATIONS, 25, 184-5, 250, 298, 304  
 COMMUNIQUES, 54*n*, 55, 408  
 CONGO RIVER, 297  
*Conner*, US destroyer, 639, 655  
 CONNOR, Lt-Cdr G. J., 515-16  
 CONOLLY, Vice-Adm R. L., 495, 577  
*Convolvulus*, British corvette, 306  
 CONVOYS, *Allied*, 6, 10, 16, 37, 62, 63, 127, 171, 184-5, 187, 197-200, 202, 204-6, 210, 240, 277, 283, 356; provision of escorts for, 29-30, 35, 253, 257, 385; increases in cargoes, 36; to Malta, 38, 89-93, 96, 98; for Australian coastal shipping, 77; reintroduced on Australia Station, 158; through Mediterranean, 202, 299-300, 302, 306-8; to Russia, 203, 250, 360-1; enemy submarine offensive against, 207, 254-6, 260-1; provision of air cover for, 268; return 9 Division from M.E., 287, 296; system in Indian Ocean, 357-8, 382-4, 393. *Enemy*, 184, 201, 413  
*Conway*, US destroyer, 596  
*Conyngnam*, US destroyer, 288*n*, 328-9, 338  
 COOK, Capt W. F., 492, 570-1  
*Coolana*, Australian ship, 159



- COOPER, Capt A. H., 639, 644  
*Cootamundra*, Australian corvette, 295, 541*n*; in eastern Australian waters, 261; Ambon surrender, 696-8  
*Coptic*, British ship, 79-80  
*Coral Sea*, US escort carrier, 401  
 CORAL SEA (Sketches pp. 43, 48), 39, 43, 62, 173, 214, 241, 262, 282, 288, 295, 498; Japanese plans for operations in, 40-1, 113; cessation of Allied patrols in, 286-7  
 CORAL SEA, BATTLE OF, 44-53, 56, 58-9, 61, 82, 88, 108-9, 113, 119, 165, 186, 459, 478; enemy claim victory in, 54; MacArthur's communique on, 55; effect of enemy losses in, 87; heralds eclipse of battleship, 703  
 CORBETT, J. S., 528*n*  
 COREY, Lt-Cdr H. J., 257  
 CORNISH, Ldg Seaman R. J., 513*n*  
*Cornish City*, British ship, 297  
*Cornwall*, British cruiser, 15-16, 18-19  
 CORON BAY, 516, 519*n*  
 CORONET OPERATION, 665  
 CORON ISLAND, 517  
*Corpus Christi*, US escort vessel, 554-6  
*Corregidor*, US escort carrier, 401  
 CORREGIDOR, 301, 310, 597-8, 602  
 CORRIGAN, F-Lt J. A., 284, 289  
 CORRIGHAN, Engr Lt-Cdr M., 538  
 CORSICA, 303, 446, 448  
*Cortellazzo*, Italian ship, 199  
 COSVETTES, 315, 708  
 COSGRAVE, Colonel L. M., 681  
 COS ISLAND, 313  
 COSTER, Rear-Adm F. W., 211  
 COURRIER BAY, 45  
 COUSIN, Capt A. P., 396, 578, 589-91; comds *Katoomba*, 244, *Manoora*, 277, 418, 484, 507-8, 620, 622; on need for tropical leave, 482*n*  
 COWARD, Capt J. G., 523-4  
 COWEN, AB D. L. B., 294*n*  
*Cowpens*, US aircraft carrier, 531  
*Cowra*, Australian corvette, 436*n*, 541*n*, 625  
 COX'S BAZAR, 561-2  
 CRABB, Rear-Adm G. J. B., 679*n*  
 CRACE, Adm Sir John, 8-10, 34, 41, 43, 45, 47, 53, 113; comds Australian Squadron and Anzac Force, 4; in Coral Sea Battle, 48-52  
 CRACKNELL, Lt D. K., 281  
 CRAFT, Cpl C. M., 544*n*  
 CRATER PENINSULA, 685  
 CRAWFORD, Capt S. H., 301, 482  
 CREASEY, Lt-Cdr R. H., 383, 573  
*Cremer*, Netherlands ship, 240*n*  
 CREMER, AB V. J., 280*n*  
 CRETE, 98, 116*n*, 312-13  
 CRETE, BATTLE OF, 154, 222, 227*n*  
 CRETIN, CAPE, 271, 342-3, 373-4, 378, 396  
 CRILLY, Sgt A. A., 319, 322  
 CRIMEA, 30, 37, 202  
 CRIPPS, Rt Hon Sir Stafford, 14, 23  
 CROCODILE OPERATION, 569  
 CROTON, Cpl. 545  
 CROWE, Sig W. L., 627  
 CRUSADER OPERATION, 112  
 CRUTCHLEY, Adm Sir Victor, VC, 165, 171, 232-3, 240-1, 286, 290-1, 330, 369-70, 380-1; comds Australian Sqn, 113; in Solomons operations, 121-2, 124-5, 130, 132, 134-9, 142*n*, 150-2, 161-2, 334, comments on Battle of Savo Island, 153-5; in New Guinea operations, 173-4, 335-7, 342-3, 375-7, 400, 415-16, 421, 424-7, 429-33; career of, 434, 441  
 CULVERIN OPERATION, 352, 363-4, 449, 465, 467, 469, 473  
*Cumberland*, British cruiser, 391, 505  
*Cummings*, US destroyer, 391, 401*n*, 419  
 CUNNINGHAM, Admiral of the Fleet Viscount, 154, 199-200, 201*n*, 202, 222, 227*n*, 304-5, 308, 352, 361*n*, 475, 528*n*, 703; C-in-C Mediterranean, 38; heads Admiralty delegation in Washington, 91; signals surrender of Italian Fleet, 312; on role of British Navy in Pacific, 363  
 CUNNINGHAM, Cpl J., 309*n*  
 CURTEIS, Admiral Sir Alban, 90  
 CURTIN, Rt Hon John, 34, 55*n*, 58, 106, 107*n*, 108, 110, 187, 190, 471; announces appointment of MacArthur, 31; on enemy threat to Australia, 55-6; seeks concentration of Allied naval forces in Pacific, 186, 468, 473, 475; attends London PM's conference, 470; strength of RAN, 472; formation of British Commonwealth Force, 667-8  
*Cushing*, US destroyer, 233  
 CYCLOPS MOUNTAINS, 399  
 CYPRUS, 313-14  
 CYRENAICA, 2, 27, 39, 60, 89, 91, 97, 202  
*Dace*, US submarine, 395-6, 406, 517-18  
*Dagfred*, Norwegian ship, 22*n*  
 DAGUA, 625, 630  
 DAGUPAN (Sketch p. 588), 585, 588-9, 594  
 DAKAR, 207, 299, 705  
 D'ALBAS, Capt A., 608*n*, 609*n*, 610*n*  
 DALHOUSIE POINT, 568  
 DALLMAN HARBOR, 632  
*Daly*, US destroyer, 370, 372, 375, 377, 380-1, 395, 400, 417*n*, 426, 431-2, 480-1, 495, 503*n*, 524  
 DAMPIER STRAIT, 272, 326, 335, 343  
 DANKKERTS, Vice-Adm V. H., 13, 79, 358  
 DANDRIWAD RIVER, 436, 461  
 DANIEL, Adm Sir Charles, 391, 469-70, 572-3  
*Dardanus*, British ship, 22*n*  
 DAR-ES-SALAAM, 28, 547  
*Darter*, US submarine, 517-18  
*Darvel*, ammunition supply issuing ship, 554-5  
 DARWIN (Map p. 263; Sketch p. 33), 77*n*, 176-8, 180-1, 224, 260*n*, 262, 265-6, 419-20, 549, 555, 694, 696; air raids, 88, 264, 347; Australian naval strength at, 101; proposed development as base for Eastern Fleet, 105; operations of RAN small ships from, 211-24  
*Dashiell*, US destroyer, 503*n*, 507  
 DATU ISLAND, 545  
 DAUNT, AB T., 393*n*  
 DAVAO, 395, 412-13, 415-16, 425-6, 499, 533  
 DAVIDSON, Lt-Cdr D. M. N., 319, 323, 543-5  
 DAVIES, Lt D. A. L., 282*n*  
 DAVISON, Rear-Adm R. E., 400-2, 518-20  
 DAWBORN, Lt-Cdr R. M., 151*n*  
*Day*, US destroyer escort, 638  
 DEANS, Lt W. H., 204  
 DEBENHAM, Sub-Lt I. K., 513*n*  
 DEBOYNE ISLAND (Sketch p. 119), 45, 47, 49  
 DECHANEUX, Capt E. F. V., comds *Warramunga*, 253, 288, 337, 342, 345, 374-6, *Australia*, 377, 380, 512, 513*n*  
 DECORATIONS, 714  
*Decoy*, British destroyer, 16  
 DEFENSIVELY EQUIPPED MERCHANT SHIPS; work of RAN personnel, 706-7; casualties, 707  
*Deimos*, 557*n*  
 DELANEY, AB F. G., 280*n*  
 DELGADO, CAPE, 547  
*Deloraine*, Australian corvette, 252, 261, 295*n* 436*n*, 541*n*, 550*n*; rescues survivors from *Lydia M. Childs*, 256; New Guinea, 440, 628-9  
 DELUGE OPERATION, 630  
 DENNIS, Spr E. T., 629*n*  
 DENOVAN, Cdr. R. A., 245, 684  
*Dent*, US destroyer transport, 285, 289  
 D'ENTRECASTEAUX ISLAND, 240, 243, 272, 328  
*Denver*, US cruiser, 495, 505, 522, 528, 596-7, 650, 654  
 DEREVYANKO, Lt-Gen, 681  
 DERNA, 89, 91, 112, 302  
*Derwent*, British destroyer, 287*n*  
*Dessie*, Italian submarine, 201  
 DE VERE, AB A. A., 584*n*  
*Devonshire*, British cruiser, 37, 287  
*Devonshire*, British transport, 185*n*  
*Dewey*, US destroyer, 43*n*, 129-30, 153  
 DEXTER, D. S., 345*n*, 436*n*, 437*n*  
 DEXTERITY OPERATION, 334, 338, 343*n*, 346  
*Diamantina*, Australian frigate, 687, 694-6  
*Dickerson*, US transport, 579  
*Dido*, British cruiser, 311*n*  
 DIEGO GARCIA (Sketch p. 192), 12, 193-4, 197, 203, 206-7  
 DIEGO SUAREZ (Sketch p. 188), 4, 16, 37, 42, 45, 60, 64-5, 73-4, 89, 155, 187-9  
 DILI, 694

- DILLO ISLAND**, 337  
**DILL**, Field Marshal Sir John, 107  
**DINAGAT ISLAND** (Sketch p. 523), 500, 503, 507, 522-3  
**DINE**, Capt L. N., 682  
**DIPLOMAT OPERATION**, 391  
**DIRECTOR OPERATION**, 335  
**DIXON**, Lt-Cdr J. H. P., comds *Kapunda*, 269, 281-2, *Gawler*, 394, 664, 684  
**DIXON**, Rt Hon Sir Owen, 108*n*, 110*n*  
**DJIDJELLI**, 201  
**Dobbin**, US destroyer tender, 65  
**DOBO**, 180, 212, 266  
**DOBODURA**, 266-8, 281  
**DOCKS**, 379  
**DODECANESE ISLAND**, 313-14  
**DOE**, Maj-Gen J. A., 405  
**DOENITZ**, Grand Admiral Karl, 26-7, 29-30, 207-8, 298, 300, 303-4, 310-11, 313, 354-5; appointed to command German Navy, 251  
**DONGAS ISLAND**, 323-4  
**DONNELLY**, AB C. D., 584*n*  
**DONOVAN**, Cdr J., 696-7; comds *Gascoyne*, 103, 439  
**DOOLITTLE**, Maj-Gen J. H., 598  
**Doomba**, Australian minesweeper, 71, 708; escorts Australian convoys, 77*n*, 78; in 20th MS Flotilla, 549  
**DOORMAN**, Rear-Adm K. W. F. M., 154  
**Dorsetshire**, British cruiser, 15-16; sunk, 18-19  
**DOUGHERTY**, Maj-Gen I. N., 700  
**DOVE BAY**, 627-30  
**DOVERS**, Rear-Adm W. J., comds *Swan*, 625-8, 630-2, 699  
**DOWLING**, Vice-Adm Sir Roy, 223, 677; comds *Hobart*, 292, 602  
**DOWN**, Lt I. F. G., 492  
**DOWNWARD**, Surgeon Capt C. A., 145, 151  
**DOYLE**, Lt-Cdr J. A., 327*n*, 330, 439  
**DOYLE**, W. H., 165*n*  
**DRACULA OPERATION**, 474, 660  
**Dragon**, British cruiser, 15  
**DRAGON OPERATION**, 450  
**Drayton**, US destroyer, 288*n*, 338, 371, 376  
**DRINIUMOR RIVER**, 436, 461-2  
**Dubbo**, Australian corvette, 555; commissioned, 104*n*; rescues survivors of *Wallaroo*, 295; in Wewak operations, 628-32; Rabaul surrender, 685  
**Duguay-Trouin**, French cruiser, 301*n*  
**DUGUMUR BAY**, 440-1  
**Duke of York**, British battleship, 4, 361, 679  
**DUKE OF YORK ISLANDS**, 346  
**DULAG**, 495, 506, 510, 513, 539  
**DUMPU**, 331-2  
**Duncan**, US destroyer, 228  
**DUNCAN**, Capt H., 252  
**DUNDAS STRAIT**, 218, 694  
**Dunedin Star**, British transport, 185*n*  
**Dunlap**, US destroyer, 391, 401*n*, 419  
**Duntroon**, Australian transport, 16, 62, 692-3, 706, 709  
**Du Page**, US attack transport, 501*n*  
**Duquesne**, French cruiser, 301*n*  
**DURBAN** (Sketch p. 356), 15, 28, 37, 42, 77, 104, 189, 208, 210, 296-7, 316, 354-5, 547, 567  
**Dureenbee**, Australian trawler, 159-60, 557*n*  
**DURGIN**, Rear-Adm C. T., 577, 594  
**DURNFORD**, Vice-Adm J. W., 106  
**Durraveen**, Australian minesweeper, 708  
**DUTCH HARBOUR**, 76, 82, 84, 87  
**DWYER**, Lt-Cdr H. K., 698  
**DYCE**, Lt A., 285  
**DYKE**, Maj-Gen L. G. H., 693-4  
**DYKE ACLAND BAY**, 245-6  
  
**Eagle**, British aircraft carrier, 89-91  
**EAMES**, AB F. W., 584*n*  
**EAST AFRICA**, 19, 61, 80, 354  
**EAST CAPE**, 115, 118, 236, 238, 247, 284  
**EASTER ISLAND**, 297*n*  
**EASTICK**, Brig T. C., 689  
**EASTMAN**, Lt F. E., 384-5  
**Easton**, British destroyer, 202  
**EAther**, Maj-Gen K. W., 699-700  
**Eaton**, US destroyer, 596  
**Echuca**, Australian corvette, 104*n*, 295*n*; New Guinea, 269; at Koepang surrender, 693; casualties, 711  
  
**Echunga**, Australian ship, 76  
**ECK**, Kapitaneutnant Heinz, 392*n*  
**ECUADOR**, 599  
**EDELSTEN**, Adm Sir John, 604, 614  
**EDEN**, Rt Hon Sir Anthony, 467  
**EDMONDS**, AB R. W., 511*n*  
**Eduardo**, British ship, 700  
**Edward Chambers**, US ship, 261  
**Edwards**, US destroyer, 638  
**EDWARDS**, Lt J. W., 497  
**EEDIE**, R., 161  
**EFATE ISLAND**, 10, 112-13, 121, 123  
**Egret**, British sloop, 198  
**E. G. Seubert**, US tanker, 382*n*, 384  
**EGUM ISLAND**, 328  
**EGYPT** (Map p. 300), 1, 3, 27, 89-90, 92, 97-9, 184, 199, 200, 262, 599, 600  
**EHRMAN**, J., 360*n*, 449*n*, 465*n*, 467*n*, 469*n*, 473, 474*n*, 616*n*, 617*n*, 659*n*, 665*n*, 667*n*, 668*n*, 673*n*  
**EICHEMBERGER**, Lt-Gen R. L., 408  
**EICHE OPERATION**, 311, 313  
**EISENHOWER**, General of the Army Dwight D., 111, 199, 303, 309, 317, 448-9  
**Ekma**, British transport, 185*n*  
**ELBA ISLAND**, 446, 448  
**ELCHO ISLAND**, 265  
**ELDER**, Maj J. S., 343*n*  
**Eldorado**, US amphibious force command ship, 350  
**Elizabeth Bakke**, Norwegian ship, 91  
**ELKTON PLANS**, 275-6, 284, 330-2, 346  
**ELLER**, AB H. P., 513*n*  
**ELLERSHAW**, Lt J. W., 280  
**Ellet**, US destroyer, 130, 149, 152-3  
**ELLICE ISLANDS**, 348, 695  
**ELLIS**, Sir Albert, 695  
**ELLIS**, Lt J. S., 291*n*  
**El Madina**, British ship, 382*n*, 386  
**Elmore**, US transport, 501*n*  
**Elsa**, Norwegian ship, 22*n*  
**Elysia**, British ship, 76  
**Emerald**, British cruiser, 17  
**EMERALD ENTRANCE**, 634-5  
**EMIRAU ISLAND**, 367, 381, 393*n*, 490  
**Empire City**, British ship, 547  
**Empire Day**, British ship, 547  
**Empire March**, British ship, 193  
**Empire Nomad**, British ship, 209  
**Empire Pride**, British transport, 189  
**Empress**, British escort carrier, 660  
**EMPRESS AUGUSTA BAY** (Sketch p. 634), 333-4, 577  
**Empress of Britain**, British transport, 37*n*  
**Empress of Canada**, British transport, 37*n*  
**Encounter**, British destroyer, 700  
**ENDAIADERE CAPE**, 242, 244, 247  
**Endeavour**, British ship, 67  
**ENDO**, Vice-Adm Y., 408-9  
**ENGANO CAPE**, 519, 521, 529, 532  
**ENGEI ISLAND**, 368-9  
**ENGLER**, Pte W. J., 333  
**ENGLISH**, Capt W. M., 336, 441*n*  
**ENGLISH CHANNEL**, 275, 309, 443  
**ENTWETOK ISLAND**, 350, 364, 366, 368-9, 397, 435, 479, 500  
**Enterprise**, British cruiser, 15, 17, 19, 445  
**Enterprise**, US aircraft carrier, 3, 5, 52*n*, 81, 85-7, 121, 124, 161, 163, 191, 226*n*, 228-32, 234-5, 275, 458, 519-20, 605  
**Epaminondas C. Embiricos**, Greek ship, 382*n*  
**Epping Forest**, 501*n*  
**Erebus**, British monitor ship, 20  
**Erinna**, British ship, 66  
**Erling Brøvig**, Norwegian tanker, 382*n*, 384-5  
**ERWIN**, AB J. N., 513*n*  
**ESDALE**, Capt J. C. D., comds *Adelaide*, 197-8, 417; NOIC New Guinea, 542, 625, 629  
**Eskimo**, British destroyer, 445  
**ESPERANCE**, 159, 192, 297  
**ESPERANCE CAPE**, 128*n*, 129, 132, 226-8, 233, 249, 274  
**ESPIRITU SANTO** (Sketch p. 291), 113, 120, 135, 153, 163, 226, 231, 233-4, 247, 273, 290-2, 331, 513, 536  
**Essex**, US aircraft carrier, 609  
**Etamin**, US ship, 342  
**Eugenie Livanos**, Greek ship, 193  
**Euryalus**, British cruiser, 572, 604, 683-4

- EUROPE, 1, 32, 298, 302, 326, 444*n*; plans for invasion of, 39, 107, 109, 111-12, 303, 309; Allied operations in, 448-51, 473-5, 599, 617
- EUROPEAN THEATRE, 32, 99, 100, 362
- EVA ISLAND, 325
- EVANS, Lt A. R., 279, 290
- EVANS DEAKIN & COMPANY, 104*n*, 315*n*
- EVANS HEAD, 255
- EVANS LOMBE, Capt E. M., 363*n*
- EVATT, Rt Hon H. V., 34, 55-6, 60*n*, 106-8, 110-11, 353
- Eversole, US destroyer, 517
- EVERSON, OD N. J., 584*n*
- Exeter, British cruiser, 700
- Exmoor, US ship, 22*n*
- EXMOUTH GULF (Sketch p. 320), 264, 317-18, 390, 416-17, 419, 556
- Express, British destroyer, 191*n*
- EYERS, Lt-Cdr H. C., 67
- EZARD, Ldg Seaman E. J., 584*n*
- FADDEEN, Rt Hon Sir Arthur, 667*n*
- FAIRFAX-ROSS, Maj B., 239, 441*n*, 490-1
- FAIRMILE MOTOR LAUNCHES, 218, 221, 439-40
- FAISI (Sketch p. 634), 114, 163-4, 284
- FAKFAK, 39
- FAKIR POINT, 564
- FALLS, AB W. G., 319, 323-4, 543, 692*n*
- Falmouth, British sloop, 392
- FANGALAWA BAY, 700
- Fanning, US destroyer, 391, 401*n*, 419
- Fanshaw Bay, US escort carrier, 530
- FAR EAST, 30, 184, 202, 295, 358, 364, 467-8, 474-5
- FARGO, Lt-Cdr A. W., 689
- FARM COVE (Map p. 69), 65-6, 70, 73
- FARNCOMB, Rear-Adm H. B., comds *Australia*, 124, 132-3, 154, *Attacker*, 380, 450, Australian Squadron, 536, 579, 592-4, 596-7, 630-1, 642, 644, 651-2, 654-6
- FARQUHAR-SMITH, Lt-Cdr A., 253
- Farragut, US destroyer, 43*n*, 47, 50*n*, 53
- FARRELL, Tom, 65*n*
- FAURO ISLAND (Sketch p. 634), 123, 135, 633, 635
- Fayette, US transport, 501*n*
- FECHTELDER, Adm W. M., 371-3, 400, 402-3, 415, 420-1, 423, 443, 481, 494, 508-9, 600
- FELDT, Cdr E. A., 42*n*, 243*n*, 274*n*, 278*n*, 279*n*, 341*n*, 406*n*, 490; SIO North-Eastern Area, 8, 122, 238, 285; NOIC Torokina, 625
- Felix Roussel, French transport, 62
- Fencer, British escort carrier, 574
- FENTON, AB G. K., 513*n*
- FERGUSON ISLAND, 175, 182
- Ferncastle, Norwegian tanker, 297, 393*n*
- FIELD, Brig J., 118
- FIGGIS, Maj P. E., 335-6
- Fiji ISLANDS (Sketch p. 33), 3-5, 8, 23, 56-8, 87, 113*n*, 119, 121, 125, 349-50
- Fingal, Norwegian ship, 256, 259, 557*n*
- FINISTERRE, CAPE, 198
- FINSCHHAFFEN, 114, 270, 276, 326, 329-31, 340, 373, 442, 635
- FIRTH, Sub-Lt R., 289, 309
- FISHER, Adm Sir Douglas, 573
- FISHER, Stoker H. L., 635*n*
- FISHER, AB W. R., 584*n*
- FITCH, Vice-Adm A. W., 41-5, 84, 331
- Fiume, Italian cruiser, 147
- Flamingo, British sloop, 567-8
- FLAT ISLAND, 325
- Fletcher, US destroyer, 427, 431-2, 485
- FLETCHER, Adm F. J., 5, 8, 41-7, 49-53, 81-2, 84, 121, 129, 135, 139, 149-50, 161-2, 164, 173, 679
- FLETCHER, Cpl R. B., 544*n*, 692*n*
- FLINTLOCK OPERATION, 350, 367-9
- FLORIDA ISLAND, 42, 44*n*, 128*n*, 129, 130*n*, 136-7, 151, 330
- Flounder, US submarine, 548
- Flusser, US destroyer, 288*n*, 338, 371, 376, 378
- Flying Fish, US submarine, 453, 455
- FLYING FISH COVE, 16
- FLY ISLAND, 325
- FLYNN, Capt C. W., 173-4
- FOLEY, Paymaster Capt J. B., 370
- FOLEY, Sgt M. B., 336
- FONTAINE, AB E. S., 513*n*
- FOOD, 205, 314, 470, 476
- FORAGE OPERATION, 451
- FORBES, Lt J., 349-50
- Forbin, French destroyer, 301*n*
- FORD, Lt A. J., 689
- FORD, OD H. D., 584*n*
- Formidable, British aircraft carrier, 4, 13, 15, 17, 60, 79, 126-7, 185, 304, 556, 574, 611-12, 614, 662, 664
- FORMOSA (Sketch p. 33), 41, 211, 397, 411-12, 465, 467-9, 478-9, 496-7, 499, 503, 575-7, 594-5, 604-5, 607
- FOROK, 628, 633
- FOROK POINT, 630-1, 633
- FORRESTAL, James, 225
- FORSYTH, W. D., 694
- Fort Buckingham, British ship, 382*n*
- Fort La Maune, British ship, 382
- Fort Lee, US tanker, 547
- Fort McLeod, British ship, 382*n*
- Fort Stikine, British ship, 393
- Fortune, British destroyer, 16, 60, 80, 191*n*, 209
- FOUL POINT, 559, 562-4
- FOURCROFT, CAPE, 218
- FOWLER, Cdr A. E., 686-7
- Foxhound, British destroyer, 16, 208-9
- FOX-STRANGWAYS, Col V., 695
- FRANCE, 25, 60, 109, 111, 275, 359, 362, 444, 448-51
- FRANCIS, Midshipman J. W., 406, 507, 512, 526, 537, 581, 584, 597, 605*n*
- Franklin, US aircraft carrier, 519, 605
- FRASER, Adm of the Fleet Lord, 361, 572-3, 616, 630, 679, 681, 683, 685; C-in-C Home Fleet, 293; comds Eastern Fleet, 464; becomes C-in-C British Pacific Fleet, 476-7
- FRASER, Rt Hon P., 470
- FRAWLEY, AB G. R., 584*n*
- Frazier, US destroyer, 596
- FREETOWN, 207-8
- PREJUS, 450
- Fremantle, Australian corvette, 295*n*, 550*n*, 684-5
- FREMANTLE (Map p. 678), 61-2, 80, 101, 104, 178, 190-4, 196-7, 203-4, 221, 287, 294-5, 297, 381, 388, 390-1, 417, 419, 477, 544, 547-8, 549*n*, 550-1, 553-7, 560-1, 570-2, 574; Allied submarines based on, 105, 121*n*, 277*n*, 414, 661; hospitality to crew of *Suffolk*, 315
- Fremont, US ship, 521*n*
- FRENCH ARMY, 90, 446, 448
- FRENCH GOVERNMENT, 444
- FRENCH INDO-CHINA, 494
- FRENCH NAVY, 299-302, 417*n*, 444, 446, 450
- FRENCH WEST AFRICA, 299
- Friedrich Eckholdt, German destroyer, 250
- Fritillary, British corvette, 207
- Fubuki, Japanese destroyer, 12*n*, 227-8
- FUCHIDA, Mitsuo, 24*n*
- FUEL, 414, 571-2, 608, 618
- FUJI, MOUNT, 701
- FUKUDOME, Vice-Adm S., 28*n*, 283, 395, 499, 503, 519-20
- Fuller, US transport, 501*n*
- FULLER, Maj-Gen H. H., 420
- Fultala, 22*n*
- FUNAFUTI, 348, 350
- Furutaka, Japanese cruiser, 6, 40, 113*n*, 141-2, 147, 149, 227; sunk, 228
- Fuso, Japanese battleship, 426, 499, 517, 523; sunk, 524-5, 527, 532*n*
- Gaasterkerk, Netherlands ship, 209
- GABO ISLAND, 75-6, 708
- GAGE ROADS, 390
- GALE, Cdr D'A. T., 535, 693-4
- GALELA (Sketch p. 442), 481, 483, 486
- GALELA BAY, 485, 625
- GALVANIC OPERATION, 349
- Gambia, British (later NZ) cruiser, 185, 197, 287, 391, 401*n*, 417*n*, 464, 572, 674, 679
- Gambier Bay, US escort carrier, 530, 532*n*, 533
- Gamododo, US naval supply depot ship, 338
- Gandara, British ship, 22*n*
- GANDHI, Mahatma, 14
- Ganges, British ship, 22*n*
- GANNON, OD R. J., 584*n*

- GARDEN ISLAND (Map p. 69), 64-6, 68, 70, 72-3, 338, 481, 579
- GARDEN ISLAND, W.A., 543
- GARIGLIANO RIVER, 446
- Garret*, Netherlands ship, 392
- GARRATTY, Motor Mech G. W., 294*n*
- GARSIA, Capt R. C., 266-7
- GARVEY, Maj K. B., 178
- Gascoyne*, Australian frigate, 103; New Guinea, 436, 439, 500-1; Leyte, 496, 504, 506, 508, 534-5, 537-8; Luzon, 579-81, 584-5, 587, 593; Balikpapan, 649-50, 652, 654, 656-7; Japanese surrenders, 688, 700; casualties, 711
- GASKELL, Surg-Lt J. M., 291*n*
- GASMATA (Sketch p. 7), 9, 113-14, 133*n*, 334-8, 340, 341*n*, 381
- GATACRE, Rear-Adm G. G. O., 135, 136*n*, 142, 150
- GAVUTU, 122, 129-30, 136, 153, 167
- Gawler*, Australian corvette, 35*n*, 104*n*, 295*n*; with Eastern Fleet, 203-4, 298, 316, 393-4, 561; in 21st MS Flotilla, 301-2, 573; Mediterranean, 304-8, 312-13; refits in South Africa, 314-15; Pacific, 664, 684
- GAY, Lt W. L., 682
- GAZELLE PENINSULA (Sketch p. 7), 335, 490, 685
- Gazon*, British ship, sunk, 205
- Geelong*, Australian corvette, 262, 295*n*, 436*n*, 541*n*; midjet submarine raid on Sydney Harbour, 65, 68; loss of, 542-3, 709
- GEELVINK BAY (Sketch p. 421), 399, 400, 411, 420
- GELLATLY, Capt L., 630*n*
- GENERAL HEADQUARTERS S.W.P.A., 54-5, 115, 176, 181, 236, 238-9, 264, 276, 493-4, 515-16, 619-20, 627, 647
- GENEVA CONVENTION, 258-60
- GENOA, 311-12
- Genota*, Netherlands tanker, 29
- GEORGE VI, King, 293, 304
- George Clymer*, US transport, 333
- GEORGE CROSS, 714-15
- George F. Elliott*, US transport, 137
- GEORGE'S HEAD (Map p. 69), 65
- GEORGE'S HEIGHTS (Map p. 69), 73
- George S. Livanos*, Greek ship, 158, 557*n*
- Geraldton*, Australian corvette, 35*n*, 295*n*, 315*n*; with Eastern Fleet, 101, 185, 203; Persian Gulf convoys, 204-6, 314; in 22nd MS Flotilla, 301; in Mediterranean, 305-6; Indian Ocean, 356-7, 392; Pacific, 573, 684
- GERMAN AIR FORCE, 30, 95-6, 98, 302, 306-8
- GERMAN ARMY, 30, 37, 89, 97, 109, 200, 299, 302, 309, 312-13, 445-8, 450
- HIGH COMMAND, 3, 98, 207; surrenders, 615
- AFRICA CORPS, 89
- GERMAN NAVY, 89, 251, 392*n*, 445; plans for defeat of Britain, 25-6; attacks Allied shipping, 26, 29, 79-80, 381, 393*n*; E-boat attacks, 91-2, 96; urges attack on Malta, 98; changes in command in Feb 1943, 250-1. *See also* SUBMARINES
- GERMANY, 25, 54, 187, 208*n*, 353, 444*n*, 465, 467-8, 470, 497, 575, 616, 702; extent of domination of Europe, 1; and Japan, 2-3, 15, 22-3, 110; Allied plans for defeat, 8, 106-7, 109, 303, 309, 362, 474; plans operations, 30, 38; and Russia, 32, 202; supply problems, 262; and Italy, 311; Allied operations against, 599-600; surrenders, 613, 615; fails to blockade Britain, 704
- GERRETT, Lt-Cdr H. B., 513*n*
- GETTING, Capt F. E., comds *Canberra*, 124, 139*n*, 140, 142-4, 151-2
- GHORMLEY, Vice-Adm R. L., 29, 116-17, 120, 125, 160, 162, 171, 173, 224-5, 227-8; comds South Pacific Force, 113, US forces in Solomons offensive, 121
- GIBALTAR (Sketch p. 300), 1-2, 4-5, 90-1, 93, 200, 202, 299-301, 306-8, 312, 358
- GIBALTAR, STRAIT OF, 200, 307
- GIBSON, Air Cmdr W. N., 223*n*
- GILA, CAPE, 483-5
- GILA PENINSULA, 483-6
- Gilbert Islands*, US aircraft carrier, 649
- GILBERT ISLANDS (Sketch p. 33), 5, 23, 111, 343*n*, 367, 398, 478, 695; Allied operations in, 347-50
- GILI GILI, 116, 128, 166-7, 172-3, 245
- GILL, Maj-Gen W. H., 409, 436
- Gillespie*, US destroyer, 378
- GILLIES, Lt-Cdr W. J., 625
- GILLISON, D., 283*n*
- Gilmer*, US destroyer transport, 329*n*
- GILMORE, Lt J. L., 336
- GIROPA POINT, 247
- GIRUWA, 120
- GIZO, 290
- GLADMAN, OD D. M., 280*n*
- Gladstone*, Australian corvette, 295, 436*n*, 439, 441, 541*n*; Timor surrender, 693-4
- Glasgow*, British cruiser, 445
- Glenelg*, Australian corvette, 269*n*, 295*n*, 436*n*, 541*n*, 700; at Ambon surrender, 698-9
- GLOBETROTTER OPERATION, 460-2
- Glory*, British aircraft carrier, 683, 685
- GLOUCESTER, CAPE (Sketch p. 339), 264, 270, 276, 331-2, 334-5, 369, 490, 578; operations at, 341-6
- GODDEN, Lt-Cdr H. E., 327*n*
- Godetta*, British corvette, 306
- GODFREY, Vice-Adm R. E., 300
- GOERING, Field Marshal H., 310
- GOGOL RIVER, 437
- Goldmouth*, British tanker, 197
- GOLD RIDGE, 42, 44*n*, 123*n*, 161
- GOLDSWORTHY, Lt-Cdr L. V., GC, 715
- GONA, 119, 236, 238-9, 249, 269
- Goncalves Zarco*, Portuguese sloop, 694
- GOOD, Percy, 6-8
- GOOD, Rear-Adm R. F., 656
- GOODENOUGH ISLAND (Sketch p. 169), 166, 174-5, 181-2, 239, 247, 283, 338, 340, 345, 396
- GOOD HOPE, CAPE OF, 37, 63, 184, 193, 202-3, 249; German submarine operations, 207-10, 295, 354-5
- GOODWIN, Lt-Cdr H. F., 685
- GOOLEY, Sgt. D. P., 544*n*, 692*n*
- Goolgwai*, HMAS, 708
- Goonambee*, Australian minesweeper, 66, 71
- Goorangai*, Australian minesweeper, 294, 708-9; casualties, 711
- GORDON-CUMMING, H. R., 355*n*, 382*n*
- Gorgon*, British ship, 281-2, 493
- GOSCHEN STRAIT, 115, 239
- GOSSE, Lt-Cdr G., GC, 715
- GOTO, Rear-Adm A., 40, 42, 44-5, 47-8, 51, 53, 227-8
- Goulburn*, Australian corvette, 35, 295*n*, 436*n*, 440, 541*n*, 549*n*, 685; in 21st MS Flotilla, 550, 573
- GOURLAY, Lt K. R., 491, 628
- GRAFTON PASSAGE, 53
- GRAHAM, Rear-Adm C. M., 10*n*, 558
- Grampus*, US submarine, 232*n*
- GRANT, Lt J. A., 214-17
- Grass Snake*, Australian ship, 700
- G. R. Clarke*, ship, 305
- GREAT BARRIER REEF, 53, 77, 287, 550
- GREECE, 1, 166*n*, 181*n*, 312, 393
- GREEK NAVY, 450
- GREEN, Cdr A. H., 561, 589-90, 621*n*, 623, 653-4; comds *Warrego*, 115-16, *Napier*, 560
- GREEN ISLANDS, 366-8, 490, 493
- Greenling*, US submarine, 335
- GREEN POINT, 65
- GREGORY, Lt-Cdr M. J., 140, 142-3, 145
- GREIG, Lt G. J., 513*n*
- Grena*, British ship, 382*n*, 386
- GRENFELL, Capt R., 19*n*
- Grenville*, British destroyer, 664
- Griffin*, British destroyer, 16, 60, 81
- GRIFFIN, William, 160*n*
- GRIFFITH, Lt-Cdr S. J., comds *Bendigo*, 175, *Stawell*, 438, 657, 684
- Griffioen*, lugger, 211
- GROSS, AB G., 601
- Grouper*, US submarine, 336
- GUADALCANAL (Map p. 148; Sketch p. 119), 42, 44-5, 88, 113, 117-18, 120, 125, 131, 139, 142, 146-7, 149, 153, 156, 160, 167, 170-1, 241, 275, 278-9, 285, 288, 330-1, 345, 349, 434-5, 478, 598, 603; coastwatchers on, 122, 161, 332; operations at, 125-30, 132-3, 136, 158, 162-4, 226-36, 247-9, 254; value of, 224-5; Japanese withdraw, 273-4
- GUARDAFUI, CAPE, 356, 382, 392
- Guardfish*, US submarine, 332, 414*n*

- GUAM (Map p. 452), 58, 81, 350, 411, 435, 443, 488, 672; ammunition expended in bombardment of, 444n; Allied invasion, 453-60, 478  
*Guatemala*, Panamanian ship, 78, 158, 557n  
 GUILLE, Lt-Cdr C. J. P., comds *Mildura*, 252, *Wagga*, 439, 684  
 GUIMARAS STRAIT, 453-4  
 GUINEA, GULF OF, 127  
 GUTUAN, 537-8, 579, 633  
 GUMMOW, AB W. G., 584n  
 GUMPRICH, Capt, 297  
*Gunbar*, HMAS, 711  
*Gunston Hall*, US LSD, 501n  
 GUNTORPE, Chief Yeoman of Sigs C. J., 144n  
*Gurnard*, US submarine, 413  
*Gwin*, US destroyer, 289  
 GYMNAST OPERATION, 112  
*Gympie*, Australian corvette, 104n, 269n, 295n, 436n, 541n; escort duty in Australian waters, 252; Solomon Sea, 439; New Guinea, 440; at Koepang surrender, 694  
 GYSS, Stoker PO L. A., 21n
- Hackleback*, US submarine, 608-9  
 HADDELEY, Capt L., 75  
*Hagikaze*, Japanese destroyer, 290  
 HAGUE CONVENTION, 259  
*Haguro*, Japanese cruiser, 40, 426, 434, 435n, 498, 517-18, 530  
 HAIFA, 90, 97  
 HAINAN, 576, 595, 616  
 HAIR, AB J. F., 255  
*Hake*, US submarine, 414n  
 HALIFAX, 393  
 HALL, Lt B. Y., 676  
 HALL, Lt-Gen C. P., 461-2, 486  
 HALL SOUND, 168-9  
 HALMAHERA (Sketch p. 442), 397, 399, 410-11, 413, 415, 424-5, 461, 481, 484-7; described, 483; operations at, 625  
 HALPIN, AB L. J., 574  
 HALSEY, Fleet Adm W. F., 230, 232, 247, 274, 276, 290, 330-1, 366-7, 451, 479-80, 488, 495-6, 499, 506, 518-21, 527, 529, 531-4, 575, 577, 595, 598, 614, 662-3, 665, 674, 677, 679, 681; comds *Enterprise* carrier task force, 5, South Pacific Area, 228, Third Fleet, 277; deploys Third Fleet in Leyte operations, 503, 515  
 HALVESTON, Sgt F., 333  
*Hamakaze*, Japanese destroyer, 14n, 166, 609-10  
 HAMAMATSU, 681  
 HAMBURGER OPERATION, 177  
*Hamilton*, US minesweeper, 373-4  
 HAMILTON, Adm Sir Louis, 655, 675  
*Hamman*, US destroyer, 9, 43n, sunk, 86  
 HAMMOND, Ldg Seaman B. A. G., 194, 195n, 196  
 HANABUSA, Cdr H., 62  
*Hancock*, US aircraft carrier, 531, 610  
 HANCOCK, Lt-Cdr K. W., 686  
 HAND, Stoker PO R. A., 582n  
 HANDA, Lt-Cdr, 271  
 HANSA BAY (Sketch p. 437), 281, 397, 399, 440  
 HANSEN, AB V. L., 513n  
*Hanyang*, British freighter, 174, 269n, 280  
 HARA, Shiro, 346-7  
 HARA, Rear-Adm T., 40, 51-2  
*Haraden*, US destroyer, 539  
*Harbin Maru*, Japanese hospital ship, 260n  
 HARCOURT, Adm Sir Cecil, 201, 207, 683-4  
 HARD, Lt A. H. G., 688  
 HARDEMAN, AB E. L., 584n  
*Harder*, US submarine, 453  
 HARDY, General Sir Campbell, 562  
 HARDY, Capt C. C., 91-3  
 HARDY, L-Cpl J. T., 544n, 692n  
 HARE, Lt-Cdr J. W., 573, 684  
 HARIKO, 242  
 HARLOW, Lt R. J., 309n  
 HARMER, F. F., 165n  
*Harmonides*, British ship, 204  
 HARNESSE, Lt E., 349-50  
*Harpasa*, British ship, 22n  
 HARRIES, Rear-Adm D. H., 292  
 HARRINGTON, Vice-Adm Sir Hastings, 505, 551  
 HARRIS, Capt G. C., 396, 406
- HARRIS, Cdr H. M., 203, 301  
*Harrison*, US destroyer, 503n  
*Hart*, British sloop, 685  
*Hart*, US destroyer, 642-4, 649, 651  
 HART, AB L. L., 584n  
*Haruna*, Japanese battleship, 13, 20, 57, 84, 228, 230, 457, 498, 517-18, 530, 595; sunk, 665  
*Harusame*, Japanese destroyer, 429  
 HARVEY, PORT, 283  
 HARWOOD, Adm Sir Henry, 91, 93, 97  
 HASE, 679  
 HASHIMOTO, Mochitsura, 28n, 74n, 75n, 76n, 78n, 158n  
*Hasty*, British destroyer, 92  
*Hatsukaze*, Japanese destroyer, 334  
*Hatsushimo*, Japanese destroyer, 586n  
*Hatsutsuki*, Japanese destroyer, 534  
*Hatsuyuki*, Japanese destroyer, 12n, 227, 272  
*Hatsuzakura*, Japanese destroyer, 679  
 HAULTAIN, Lt C. T. G., 440-1  
*Hauraki*, British ship, 191-3, 707  
 HAUWEI ISLAND, 365, 375, 377-8  
 HAWAII (Map p. 83), 3, 23, 28, 31, 37, 58, 59n, 80, 187, 500  
 HAWAIIAN RIVER, 628, 629n  
 HAWEE ISLAND, 374  
*Hawkesbury*, Australian frigate, 541n; Borneo, 620-1, 623, 639, 641-2, 644; Singapore surrender, 692-3; Koepang, 694  
*Hawkins*, British cruiser, 354, 383  
 HAYASHI, Cdr Seijiro, 166  
*H. D. Collier*, US ship, 382n  
 H.D.M.L's: 1074, 496, 501, 503-4, 508, 538; 1275, 560; 1303, 560; 1322, 693; 1324, 693; 1326, 712; 1329, 693; 1341, 522; 1343, 689; 1359, 688, 700  
 HEARNE, AB V. W., 584n  
*Hector*, British armed merchant cruiser, 16, 18  
 HEHIR, Lt T. T. M., 497  
*Helena*, US cruiser, 227, 230, 232, 289  
*Helen Moller*, British ship, 392, 393n  
 HELFRICH, Adm C. E. L., 154, 681  
*Helm*, US destroyer, 46n, 124, 138-9, 149, 173-4, 241, 258, 287, 288, 330, 334, 337, 342, 345, 582n  
 HENDERSON, CWO F. J., 213  
 HENDERSON, Maj L., 160  
 HENDERSON FIELD, 160-3, 165, 226-34, 332  
*Henley*, US destroyer, 46, 124, 132, 173-4, 241, 257, 287-8  
*Henry Gilbert Costin*, US ship, 294  
 HENRY REID BAY, 490-1, 627  
*Henry T. Allen*, US attack transport, 278, 396, 403, 407, 416-18  
 HEPBURN, Adm A. J., 130n, 139n  
*Herborg*, Norwegian ship, 80  
*Hercules*, US ship, 501n  
 HERCULES OPERATION, 449  
 HERDMAN, AB L. L., 584n  
*Hermes*, British aircraft carrier, 16, 20-1, 60  
*Hermione*, British cruiser, 37, 96  
*Hermod*, Norwegian ship, 22n  
*Hero*, British destroyer, 287n  
 HEWITT, Vice-Adm H. K., 199  
 HEYEN, Lt-Cdr G. H., 349-50  
 HIBUSON ISLAND (Sketch p. 523), 522  
 HIBUTANGEN CHANNEL, 603  
*Hilda Knudsen*, Norwegian tanker, 207  
 HILL, Ldg Stoker C. B., 94n  
 HILL, Lt-Cdr C. G., comds *Geelong*, 262, 542, *Barcoo*, 492-3, 620  
 HILL, Capt D. C., 565-6  
 HILL, OD G. J., 571n  
 HILL, Vice-Adm H. W., 348-9  
 HILL, Stoker J. H., 21n  
*Hilo*, US tender, 327  
*Hindustan*, Indian sloop, 11  
*Hiravati*, HMIS, 357  
 HIROSHIMA, 23-4, 672-3  
*Hiryu*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 13, 81, 86, 87n  
 HITACHI, 664  
 HITLER, Adolf, 2, 3, 25-7, 30, 98, 106, 249-51, 298-300, 303, 310-11, 313, 353, 599  
*Hiyei*, Japanese battleship, 13, 57, 230, 233; sunk, 234-5  
*Hiyo*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 88, 412, 458; sunk, 459  
 H. L. EDWARDS, US ship, 536

- Hobart*, Australian cruiser, 4, 34, 41, 74, 101, 103, 113, 155, 161-2, 165, 173, 241, 288, 295, 623, 656, 676, 681; Coral Sea Battle, 43, 47-9, 51-2; Solomons offensive, 121, 124-5, 137, 150, 153; New Guinea, 174, 629-31; torpedoed, 291-2; recommissioned, 602; Philippines, 603; Borneo, 621-2, 637, 639-42, 644, 649-52, 654; Tokyo Bay, 680; casualties, 712
- HOBART, 28, 105, 549*n*
- Hobby*, US destroyer, 378
- HOCKING, AB J. W., 513*n*
- HOCKING, OD R., 513*n*
- Hodges*, US destroyer escort, 589
- HODGES, Lt-Cdr D. W., 492-3
- Hoe*, US submarine, 414*n*
- Hoegh Silverdawn*, Norwegian tanker, 297
- Hoel*, US destroyer, 532-3
- HOGG, Sub-Lt T. F., 690*n*
- HOG POINT, 621
- HOKKAIDO (Sketch p. 662), 659, 663, 673, 677
- Hokoku Maru*, Japanese armed merchant cruiser, 28, 77, 191-3, 195, 707; sunk, 196
- Holbrook*, US transport, 16, 62
- HOLE, Lt-Cdr D. M., 143-4
- HOLLANDIA (Map p. 428; Sketch p. 421), 39, 264, 270, 381, 415-16, 420, 425, 441, 443, 479, 481-2, 489, 500-1, 508, 577, 578*n*, 623, 630, 632; operations at, 396-411, 413-14
- HOLLOWAY, OD L. A., 571*n*
- Hollyhock*, British corvette, 20-1
- HOLM, Lt I., 690
- HOLNICOTE BAY, 244, 249
- HOLOHAN, Lt T. J., 628
- HOMONHON ISLAND, 506
- HONG KONG (Map p. 678), 595, 660, 677, 683-5
- Honolulu*, US cruiser, 6, 247, 289, 495, 510, 513
- HONSHU (Sketch p. 662), 663, 665-6, 668, 673, 677
- HOOKINS, OD R. S., 513*n*
- HOOPER, F-Lt C. F., 309*n*
- HOPE, Lt-Col M. W., 223*n*
- Hopewell*, US destroyer, 480
- HOPKINS, Harry L., 111, 200
- HOPKINS, Maj-Gen R. N. L., 170
- HOPPER, Lt-Cdr K. J., 628, 633-4
- HORIKOSHI, J., 85*n*, 87*n*
- HORMUZ, STRAIT OF, 204-5, 298, 356-7
- HORNBY LIGHT, 68
- Hornet* (1), US aircraft carrier, 4, 24, 81, 85, 87, 164, 191, 226-7, 229; sunk, 230-1
- Hornet* (2), US aircraft carrier, 531
- Horsham*, Australian corvette, 104*n*, 295, 693
- HORSMAN, Capt W., 196
- HORTON, Lt D. C., 130, 131*n*, 279, 284-5
- Hosho*, Japanese cruiser, 81, 87*n*
- HOSKINS, CAPE, 490, 493
- Hotspur*, British destroyer, 60, 81, 92, 189, 191*n*
- Houston*, US cruiser, 503
- HOWDEN, Capt H. L., 124*n*
- Howe*, British battleship, 304, 311, 477, 551, 572, 604, 612
- HOWE, CAPE, 159, 254, 260
- HOWITT, Lt-Cdr E. M., 328, 329*n*; comds *ML427*, 628
- Hoxa*, British minesweeper, 207
- Hsu YUNG-CHANG, General, 681
- Hughes*, US destroyer, 9, 481, 501, 507-8, 521*n*
- HUGHES, AB C. M., 584*n*
- HUGHES, Hugh, 254*n*
- HUGHES, Richard, 24*n*, 65*n*
- HUGHES, Rt Hon W. M., 100, 667*n*
- Hull*, US destroyer, 130
- HULL, Lt-Cdr H. J., 294, 696
- HUMBOLDT BAY (Sketch p. 403), 381, 399, 400, 416-18, 421, 423-4, 426-7, 431, 434-5, 460-3, 483, 486, 501, 508, 578; Allied landings at, 402-5, 407-8
- Humphreys*, US destroyer transport, 329*n*, 371, 376
- HUMPHRIES, PO J. T., 716-17
- HUNT, Cdr R. B. A., NOIC Port Moresby, 115-16, 168, 241-2, 267-8, 279-80, 284; designated Naval Commander NGF, 236-7; CTG.70.5 Afloat, 500-1, 508, 537, 538*n*
- HUNTER'S BAY, 566
- HUON GULF (Map p. 263), 270-2, 328-9
- HUON PENINSULA (Map p. 263), 327, 345-6, 365, 437
- HUSKY OPERATION, 302-5
- HUSTON, AB A. W. G., 319, 323, 543
- Hutchins*, US destroyer, 370, 372, 375, 377, 380-1, 395, 400, 417*n*, 422, 426, 431, 461-3, 480-1, 495, 503*n*, 524-5
- Hutchinson*, US escort vessel, 555
- HUTCHISON, CPO G. F., 513*n*
- HYAKUTAKE, Lt-Gen H., 56, 119, 162, 372
- HYANE HARBOUR, 372, 374-8
- Hythe*, British corvette, 307-8
- Hyuga*, Japanese battleship, 498, 534, 595, 599; sunk, 665
- I1*, Japanese submarine, 273; *I3*, 249; *I6*, 59; *I8*, 547; *I10*, 28, 61, 64, 254, 357; *I11*, 158-9; *I15*, 226; *I16*, 28, 65; *I17*, 272; *I18*, 28; *I19*, 226; *I20*, 28, 65; *I21*, 28, 61, 64-5, 75, 78, 231, 252-4; *I22*, 28, 40, 61-2, 64, 66, 68, 249; *I24*, 28, 40, 61-2, 64, 66-7, 75*n*, 76, 78, 158-9; *I25*, 28; *I26*, 165, 226*n*, 233, 254, 256, 259, 272; *I27*, 28, 61-2, 64, 66-7, 357, 383-4; *I28*, 40, 61-2; *I29*, 28, 40, 61-4, 75, 296, 357; *I30*, 28; *I34*, 357; *I37*, 357; *I45*, 517; *I58*, 672; *I121*, 156; *I122*, 155; *I123*, 156; *I162*, 357; *I165*, 357; *I166*, 357; *I168*, 86; *I169*, 159; *I174*, 158-9, 254, 259, 260-1; *I177*, 254, 256, 259; *I178*, 254, 259-60; *I180*, 254, 256-7, 259-60
- ICEBERG OPERATION, 604, 605, 614, 662
- ICELAND (Map p. 83), 250, 599
- ICHIKI, Colonel K., 162
- ICHISE, Vice-Adm, 699
- Idaho*, US battleship, 3, 381
- Idomeneus*, British ship, 555
- IFOULD, Lt F. H., 393*n*
- IJUN, Rear-Adm M., 326
- IKEGAMA, Cdr, 687
- IKIN, Sig C. A., 624*n*
- Ile de France*, British transport, 36-7, 287
- Ilissos*, Greek ship, 549-51
- Illustrious*, British aircraft carrier, 37, 60, 79, 126-7, 185, 188-91, 358, 391, 401-2, 417-18, 464, 560, 571-2, 604, 611
- ILOILO, 602, 633
- IMAMURA, Lt-Gen H., 685-7, 700
- Implacable*, British aircraft carrier, 662
- Instant*, British destroyer, 60, 81, 191*n*
- Indefatigable*, British aircraft carrier, 571-2, 604, 606, 674, 677
- India*, Danish tanker, 297*n*
- INDIA (Map p. 452; Sketch p. 389), 1, 3, 4, 12-15, 20, 23, 30, 35, 56, 107, 110, 126, 184-6, 296, 317, 351, 364, 388, 465, 469-70, 604, 660, 666; first Japanese air raids on, 22; convoys to, 36; Japanese cross border from Burma, 558
- Indiana*, US battleship, 228
- Indianapolis*, US heavy cruiser, 9, 451, 455, 672
- INDIAN ARMY, 14, 558
- DIVISIONS: 5th, 683, 691. 25th, 559-60, 562, 566. 26th, 559, 567
- BRIGADES: 36th, 568-9. 53rd, 559, 565. 74th, 559, 561-3
- INDIAN NAVY, 10, 35, 104, 193, 204, 393
- INDIAN OCEAN (Map p. 452; Sketch p. 192), 1-3, 14, 19, 26, 34, 37, 42, 45, 59, 64, 81, 89, 97, 127, 184-6, 190, 197, 202, 287, 292, 295, 312, 314, 358, 384, 387, 395, 401-2, 425, 447, 463, 467, 476, 505, 560, 571, 705, 707; Allied strategy in, 4-5, 12, 350, 359, 362-3, 392, 469-70; enemy operations, 15, 23, 27-30, 61-3, 74, 76, 78-9, 202-3, 210, 354-8, 361, 381-91, 393-4; Allied bases, 35-6; British Navy commitments, 60; Eastern Fleet diversionary operations in, 126; Allied shipping losses, 191-3, 296-7
- INDISPENSABLE STRAIT, 164
- INDO-CHINA, 32*n*, 595, 599, 608
- Indomitable*, British aircraft carrier, 12, 15, 17, 60, 185, 304, 505, 571-2, 604, 613, 683
- Indora*, British ship, 22*n*
- Indus*, British ship, 192
- INGHAM, AB S., 635*n*
- INGLE, Commander, 689
- INGLETON, Maj R. N., 544*n*, 692
- INGLIS, Lt-Cdr A. D. C., 239, 490-2
- Ingram*, US destroyer, 581
- INLAND SEA, 81, 412, 415, 453, 498-9, 503, 505, 595, 608-9, 665
- INMAN, Lt-Cdr C. A. J., 218*n*
- INOUE, Adm S., 40, 45, 47, 50-1, 53, 113

## INSUMANAI ISLAND, 418-19

*Intrepid*, US aircraft carrier, 519, 605  
*Inverell*, Australian corvette, 104n, 265n, 295, 550n;  
 Balikpapan, 688; Ambon surrender, 696; Macassar, 700  
*Ioannis Fafalios*, Greek merchant ship, 547  
*Ipswich*, Australian corvette, 35n, 203n, 295n, 315n;  
 joins Eastern Fleet, 204; Persian Gulf convoys, 205; in 21st MS Flotilla, 301-2; Mediterranean, 304-7, 312-14; rescues survivors of *Peshawur*, 316;  
 Indian Ocean, 383, 560-1; Pacific, 573, 680  
 Ironbottom Sound, 167, 227, 232-5, 248  
*Iron Chieftain*, Australian ship, 74-5, 557n  
 IRONCLAD OPERATION, 37  
*Iron Crown*, Australian ship, 76, 557n  
*Iron Knight*, Australian ship, 253, 557n  
 IRRAWADDY RIVER, 352, 599, 659  
 IRRAWADDY VALLEY, 558, 565  
 IRVINE, AB R., 513n  
 IRVING, Maj-Gen F. A., 408  
 ISAACHSEN, Lt-Col O. C., 627  
*Isaac Sweers*, Netherlands destroyer, 16  
*Ise*, Japanese battleship, 498, 534, 595, 599; sunk, 665  
 ISHIGAKI ISLAND, 604, 607, 611  
*Ishikari Maru*, Japanese ship, 505  
 ISHIZAKI, Rear-Adm N., 28-9, 61, 63-4, 77-9, 185, 191, 202  
*Isis*, British destroyer, 287n  
 ISITT, AVM Sir Leonard, 681  
*Islander*, British ship, 266  
 ISMAV, General Rt Hon Lord, 107n  
*Isokaze*, Japanese destroyer, 14n, 174  
*Isonami*, Japanese destroyer, 10n  
*Isuzu*, Japanese cruiser, 534  
 ITAGAKI, Lt-Gen S., 691-2  
*Italia*, Italian battleship, 311  
 ITALIAN AIR FORCE, 30  
 ITALIAN ARMY, 2, 30, 98, 200, 302, 310  
 ITALIAN NAVY, 2, 26, 38, 90-3, 96, 98, 201, 298, 302-4, 310, 358; surrenders at Malta, 311-12  
 ITALY, 2, 15, 25-6, 98, 260, 262, 298-9, 303, 309, 312, 358, 497; Badoglio Government makes first peace overtures, 308, 311; Mussolini arrested, 310; German army occupies northern area, 313; signs Armistice, 317, 355, 446; Allied operations in, 359, 362, 445-50  
 ITO, Lt S., 65n, 73  
 ITO, Vice-Adm S., 608-10  
 ITO, Lt-Gen T., 699, 700  
*Itsumakushima*, Japanese minelayer, 426, 435n  
 IWO JIMA, 444n, 594-5, 598-600

*Jack*, US submarine, 413, 414n

JACKSON, Lt-Cdr W., 550, 684  
 JACKSON, PORT (Sketch p. 66), 67  
*Jacob van Heemskerck*, Netherlands cruiser, 189-90, 197-8, 287  
 JACQUINOT BAY (Sketch p. 7), 490-3, 541, 626-7, 685, 699  
 JAENSCH, Spr W. R., 587  
 JAFFA, CAPE, 549  
*Jalayamuna*, British ship, 35  
 JALUIT ISLAND, 5, 368-9  
*Jamaica*, British cruiser, 250, 361  
 JAMDNA ISLAND, 212  
*James Cook*, Australian ship, 265, 652  
*James D. Doty*, US ship, 438  
*James Wallace*, Australian tug, 281-2  
 JAMIESON, Sig W. T., 217n  
 JANE OPERATION, 187, 189  
*Janssens*, Netherlands ship, 269n  
 JAPAN (Map p. 452; Sketch p. 662), 1, 2, 5, 25-7, 53-4, 56, 58, 107, 111-12, 187, 275, 317, 413, 701-5; Allied plans for operations against, 8, 32-3, 106, 303, 309, 465, 467-70, 473-5, 479, 534, 616-17, 662, 665-9; attacks Burma, 10; and Germany, 22-3; strategy and planning, 30, 37, 40-1, 56-7, 88, 398, 410-11, 497; MacArthur's views on possible tactics of, 31, 109-10; accuses the Allies of attacking hospital ships, 260; supply problems, 262, 498; Allied operations against home islands, 598-9, 604-5; tonnage of shipping lost, 661; atomic bomb dropped on, 672-3; surrenders, 673-5; Allied plans for occupation, 676-7

## JAPAN—continued

—IMPERIAL HEADQUARTERS, 5-6, 23-4, 58, 127, 260n, 398, 410, 414-15, 479n, 497-8  
 JAPAN, EMPEROR OF, 669-70, 673  
 JAPANESE AIR FORCES, 17, 20, 22-4, 42, 84-5, 129, 157, 388, 396, 503, 594, 599, 619, 673; sink *Dorsetshire* and *Cornwall*, 18; in Coral Sea Battle, 49-50; Zero used as model for American Hellcat, 87; MacArthur's estimate of, 109; Solomon operations, 136, 278-9, 333-4; New Guinea, 166, 280-3, 329, 375, 381, 407, 484; Timor, 180, 215-19, 222; Battle of Bismarck Sea, 271; New Britain, 338-40, 344, 347; Borneo, 402; policy of conserving forces for decisive encounters, 479n; Philippines, 499, 513-14, 535, 539, 576; suicide attacks, 511-12, 533-5, 539, 581-7, 590-2, 594-5, 605-8, 610-12, 614; Burma, 565-6; Okinawa, 604-5, 608  
 —AIR ARMIES: *Fourth*, 413  
 —AIR DIVISIONS: *Sixth*, 413. *Seventh*, 413  
 —AIR FLEETS: I, 57, 413-15, 459. II, 499. XI, 347. XIII, 412-13  
 —AIR FLOTILLAS: 23rd, 88, 410, 412-13, 425, 646. 24th, 6, 10, 25th, 45, 50n, 88, 114, 131, 157  
 JAPANESE ARMY, 11, 58, 88, 120, 127n, 156, 163, 165, 170, 181-3, 229, 245, 264n, 272, 332, 340-1, 346, 364, 397, 408-9, 419-20, 481, 487-9, 608, 633, 670, 673, 685; MacArthur's estimate of, 109; New Guinea operations, 399, 405, 426, 435, 445, 628; New Britain, 490-1; Philippines, 534, 539-40, 597-8, 603; Burma, 558; Borneo, 619, 649, 657-8  
 —AREA ARMIES: *Second*, 413. *Eighth*, 346-7, 413, 685  
 —ARMIES: II, 399, 688. XVII, 56, 119-20, 131, 162, 436, 686. XVIII, 397, 399-400, 409, 436, 461-2, 632, 690. XXXII, 604. XXXV, 600  
 —DIVISIONS: 5th, 699. 17th, 347. 36th, 411. 48th, 694. 51st, 270  
 —FORCES: *Nankai Detachment*, 128, 131, 157. *South Seas Detachment*, 157  
 JAPANESE GOVERNMENT, 354; claims victory in Coral Sea Battle, 54; advised of particulars of hospital ship *Centauro*, 258; makes "peace-feelers" to Russia, 669; ignores Potsdam Declaration, 670, 672; announces surrender, 673, 682; estimate of strength of Japanese forces in other countries, 677  
 —SUPREME WAR COUNCIL, 608  
 JAPANESE NAVY, 16, 54, 63, 109, 111, 122-3, 175, 212, 264n, 371, 387, 411, 460, 618, 665; strength, 3; in Bay of Bengal, 21-2, 185; plans capture of Tulagi and Pt Moresby, 39-40, 43-4; in Coral Sea Battle, 46-7, 51-2, 55; in B. of Midway, 57-9, 81-8; raider activity, 78-9; in Solomons, 150n, 156, 163-4, 167, 226-7, 231, 233-4, 236, 247-8, 273-4, 289-90, 332-4; Milne Bay, 165-7, 172-3, 183; develops submarine supply system, 248-9; in B. of Bismarck Sea, 270, 272; in Indian Ocean, 387-91; revises Pacific strategy, 398; at Hollandia, 408-9; plans decisive battle with US fleet, 415; at Biak, 420, 425-7, 429, 435; in Philippines, 493, 497, 499, 503, 505-6, 515-16, 527, 531-2, 534, 539, 581, 585-6, 595, 599; at Okinawa, 608-10, 614  
 —FLEETS: *Combined Fleet*, 3, 23, 58-9, 87, 283, 398, 414-15, 453-60, 497-8. *South-East Area Fleet*, 685. *South-West Area Fleet*, 499. *First Mobile Fleet*, 412, 414-15, 435, 454-60, 498-9. *Second Fleet*, 23, 56. *Third Fleet*, 88, 282, 412. *Fourth Fleet*, 40, 113. *Eighth Fleet*, 113, 119, 127, 131, 156. *Ninth*, 398, 408-9. *Carrier Fleet*, 14, 22, 40, 54, 88  
 —FORCES: *Alutian Occupation Force*, 84. *First Mobile Force*, 81. *Second Mobile Force*, 80-1, 84. *Midway Occupation Force*, 81-2, 84. *Outer South Sea Force*, 113. *Eastern Area Advanced Force*, 252. *8th Base Force*, 114, 118, 120. *25th Special Base Force*, 264  
 —BATTLE SQUADRONS: 3rd, 13  
 —CRUISERS: 6th Div, 120, 133, 156, 163. 7th Div, 40. 18th Div, 166, 170. 23rd Div, 40, 27th Div, 40. 29th Div, 40. 30th Div, 40. 4th Sqn, 14. 5th Sqn, 40. 6th Sqn, 6, 40, 53, 113n, 227. 7th Sqn, 12, 14. 8th Sqn, 13. 18th Sqn, 6, 40, 119  
 —DESTROYERS: 1st Sqn, 13. 3rd Sqn, 271. 6th Sqn, 6. 8th Flotilla, 388. 17th Div, 167  
 —SPECIAL NAVAL LANDING FORCES, 120, 163, 211, 270, 272, 285. 3rd Kure, 167. 5th Kure, 166. 8th Kure, 127n. 5th Sasebo, 131, 166. 5th Yokosuka, 162, 167

## JAPANESE NAVY—continued

- SUBMARINE SQUADRONS AND GROUPS: 1st Sqn, 259, 3rd Sqn, 158, 259, 7th Sqn, 131, 8th Sqn, 28, 40, 61, 64-74, 75, 77-9, 21st Group, 40. *See also* SUBMARINES
- UNITS: 11th Construction, 118, 13th Construction, 118, 14th Construction, 118, 17th Naval Pioneer, 166, 21st Naval Guard, 698, 81st Garrison, 118, 131, 84th Garrison, 118
- Japara*, Netherlands transport, 173-4, 240, 262, 269n
- JAPEN ISLAND (Sketch p. 442), 424
- JAPEN STRAIT (Sketch p. 442), 423-4, 442-3
- JARRELL, Capt A. E., 427, 429, 431-3
- Jarvis*, US destroyer, 124, 137, 142, 146
- Jasmine*, British corvette, 355
- JAUNAY, Capt F. L. G., 255-6
- JAUTEFA BAY, 404
- JAVA (Map p. 83; Sketch p. 320), 8, 13, 101, 351, 388, 414, 417, 481, 548, 636, 668-9, 682
- JAVA SEA, 154, 317-18, 544-5, 548
- Javelin*, British destroyer, 94-6
- JAYWICK OPERATION, 317-25, 543-4, 691
- J. B. Ashe, 240
- Jeanne d'Arc*, French cruiser, 446
- Jean Nicolet*, US ship, 547
- JEFFERY, AB L. G., 587
- JELLEY, Lt R. F., 508
- Jenkins*, US destroyer, 290-1, 427, 622
- JENKYN, Engr-Lt H. F. M., 219
- JENNINGS, Capt, 689
- JENSEN, Mr, 265-6
- JERVIS BAY, 158, 551-2, 557
- Jesse Applegate*, US ship, 240n
- JEUNE, Cpl P. C., 396n, 406-7
- Jim Bridger*, US ship, 253
- JINKINS, Maj W. T., 211
- Jintsu*, Japanese cruiser, 164, 289
- Jobb*, US destroyer escort, 638
- JODL, Field Marshal, 310-11
- JOEL, Lt Hon A. A., 328
- JOEL, Lt J., 176-7
- JOHANNESBURG, 314-15
- John Adams*, US ship, 61, 557n
- John A. Poor*, US ship, 382n
- John Barry*, US merchant ship, 547
- John D. Ford*, US destroyer, 646
- John G. Whittier*, US ship, 294
- John Loud*, US transport, 501n
- John Rodgers*, US destroyer, 503n
- JOHNS, Lt-Cdr G. A., 261
- JOHNSON, Capt C. K., 336, 441n
- JOHNSON, AB D. K., 393n
- JOHNSON, Maj-Gen H. H., 688n
- JOHNSON, Pay-Cdr H. M., 291n
- JOHNSON, Lt K. D., 679n
- Johnston*, US destroyer, 532-3
- JOHNSTON, OD A. A., 266
- JOHNSTON, Sub-Lt I. McL., 151n
- JOHNSTON ISLAND, 8
- John Williams V*, London Missionary Society's ship, 349
- JOHORE STRAIT, 660
- JOMARD PASSAGE (Sketch p. 43), 46-8, 50
- JONES, AB A. W., 319, 323-4
- JONES, Lt-Cdr I. de J. P., 332
- JONES, Lt I. M., 513n
- Jose Navarro*, US ship, 357
- JOSSELYN, Lt-Cdr H. E., 130, 131n, 232n, 289, 309
- Julian Early*, 542
- Julien Dubuque*, US ship, 656
- Jumna*, Indian sloop, 382-3, 565-6
- Juneau*, US cruiser, 229, 232-3
- Junea*, Australian corvette, 698-9
- Junyo*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 80, 87n, 88, 230-1, 412, 458, 498
- K 9, Dutch submarine, 65, 70
- KABANGA BAY, 685
- Kadashan Bay*, US escort carrier, 530, 586
- Kaga*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 81, 86, 87n
- Kagero*, Japanese destroyer, 14n
- KAHILI, 279, 332
- KADA, Colonel T., 593-4
- KAIRIRU ISLAND, 461, 626, 628-9, 690
- KAJIOKA, Rear-Adm S., 40, 45-6, 51
- Kako*, Japanese cruiser, 6, 40, 113n, 141; sunk, 156
- KAKUTA, Vice-Adm K., 80, 82, 84, 456
- KALADAN RIVER, 559, 565
- Kalgoorlie*, Australian corvette, 35, 265n, 295n; in eastern Australian waters, 76-7, 261; Timor, 177, 181, 213-14, 216, 218; rescues *Armidale* survivors, 219-22; 21st MS Flotilla, 550, 573, 614
- Kalingo*, New Zealand ship, 251-2, 557n
- Kalinin Bay*, US escort carrier, 530, 533
- Kalk*, US destroyer, 378
- KAMADA, Vice-Admiral, 687-8
- KAMAIISHI, 663, 673, 681
- KAMIGIN ISLAND, 522
- Kamikawa Maru*, Japanese seaplane carrier, 40, 45
- KAMIKAZE ATTACKS, 533-5, 539, 581-7, 590-2, 594-5, 605-8, 610-12, 614
- KAMIRI, 442-3
- KANDA, Lt-Gen M., 686-7, 694
- Kangaroo*, Australian tender, 693, 712
- Kanimbla*, British armed merchant cruiser, 65, 70, 185n, 717; Indian Ocean, 194, 197; converted to Australian LSI, 278; at Hollandia, 396, 400, 403, 407; Morotai, 481-6; Philippines, 495, 501, 507-8, 578, 580, 586-8, 590-2; Borneo, 638, 640-2, 646, 649-50, 652-5
- Kapunda*, Australian corvette, 104n, 295n, 436n; New Guinea, 269, 281-2, 438-9; Halmahera, 625; at Kuching surrender, 689-90
- Kara Kara*, Australian boom vessel, 712
- Karang*, Australian boom vessel, 712
- KARIMATA ARCHIPELAGO, 321-2
- KARIMATA STRAIT, 321, 544
- KARKAR ISLAND (Sketch p. 437), 439
- Karsik*, Netherlands ship, 115-16, 166n, 239, 242, 244-7, 269
- Kashii*, Japanese cruiser, 11, 356
- Kashima*, Japanese cruiser, 40, 113
- Kashumi*, Japanese destroyer, 14n
- Katoomba*, Australian corvette, 295n; New Guinea, 240, 244, 249, 269, 436n, 541n; at Timor surrender, 693-4; casualties, 712
- Katoomba*, Australian transport, 159
- Kattegat*, Norwegian ship, 198
- KAU BAY, 410, 483
- KAVIENG (Map p. 263; Sketch p. 119), 40, 114, 120, 123, 133, 156, 272, 275, 279, 331, 347, 365-7, 370-1, 381, 397
- KAWAGUCHI, Maj-Gen K., 165
- Kawakaze*, Japanese destroyer, 290
- Kawauchi*, Japanese destroyer, 12n
- K.B. MISSION, 170
- Kedah*, British ship, 240
- KEELING, AB J. I., 280n
- KEENAN, Lt-Cdr J. R., 232n, 332-3
- KEITH, Lt-Cdr G. A., 204
- KELLEY, Cdr M. R., 105
- KELLY, Lt-Col J. L. A., 695
- Kembu Maru*, Japanese ship, 270n, 272
- Kempensfelt*, British destroyer, 684
- KENNEDY, A., 75
- KENNEDY, Maj D. G., 42, 44, 122, 279, 284-5
- KENNEDY, AB H., 584n
- KENNEDY, Lt John F., 290
- KENNEY, General George C., 121, 171, 225, 328, 330, 331n, 335, 410-11, 494, 575, 594, 619, 641
- KENTISH, Rev L. N., 265-6
- Kentucky*, US tanker, 93
- Kenya*, British cruiser, 90, 382, 464, 559, 568-9
- Kenyo Maru*, Japanese transport, 128
- KEPPEL HARBOUR, 323
- KERAMA ISLANDS, 606, 609
- KERAMA KAIKYO, 606
- KERR, AB A. G., 571n
- KESSACK, Lt J. H. H., 716
- KESSELRING, Field Marshal A., 27, 30, 98-9, 310-11
- KEYES, Admiral of the Fleet Lord, 500
- Key Pittman*, US ship, 268, 269n, 283
- KEYS, AB V. C. J., 571n
- Khedive Ismail*, British ship, 382n, 383-4, 393n
- KHORRAMSHAHR, 203, 357
- Kia Kia*, British launch, 695-6
- Kiama*, Australian corvette, 436n, 552; New Guinea, 441, 541n; New Britain, 491, 685; casualties, 712
- KIEFA (Sketch p. 618), 114, 122, 134, 284



- KIKUSUI ATTACKS, 608, 610-11, 617; *see also* KAMIKAZE ATTACKS
- Kikuzuki*, Japanese destroyer, 40, 44
- KILAND, Vice-Adm I. N., 578, 587
- KILINDINI (Map p. 83), 19, 60-1, 79-81, 127, 189, 191, 207, 296, 316, 354-5, 382-3
- Killen*, US destroyer, 495, 503*n*, 524-5, 638, 640, 654, 656
- KIMURA, Rear-Adm M., 270-2
- Kinai Maru*, Japanese transport, 128, 166
- KING, Fleet Adm Ernest J., 20-30, 34, 56, 58-60, 100, 112, 116-18, 126, 190-1, 200, 276, 350, 359-60, 366, 397, 401, 416, 478, 505, 572, 599; C-in-C US Fleet, 8; institutes new numbered fleet system, 277; on role of British Navy in Pacific, 363-4, 475
- KING, Ord Art E. K., 291*n*
- KING, Rt Hon W. L. Mackenzie, 110*n*
- King George V*, British battleship, 4, 304, 312, 477, 604, 613, 626, 664, 674-5, 677, 679, 701
- KING-TWO OPERATION, 514-15
- KINKAID, Adm Thomas C., 42, 53, 229-30, 232, 234, 335, 369-73, 375, 377, 381, 400, 415-17, 421, 424-7, 434, 461-2, 480, 494, 513-14, 516, 521, 527, 529, 531, 534, 536, 575-7, 580, 586-7, 591-2, 594-6, 620, 629-30, 643, 660, 677
- Kinryu Maru*, Japanese transport, 164
- Kinu*, Japanese cruiser, 39-40, 388, 390, 426, 429, 434, 435*n*
- Kinugasa*, Japanese cruiser, 6, 40, 113*n*, 141, 227; sunk, 234
- KIRCHNER, AB M. D., 584*n*
- Kirishima*, Japanese battleship, 13, 57, 84, 230, 233-4; sunk, 235
- KIRIWINA ISLAND, 276, 284-5, 441
- KIRK WALL-SMITH, Lt A., 341*n*
- Kishinami*, Japanese destroyer, 518
- KISKA ISLAND (Map p. 83), 23, 81, 87
- KISSANE, Ldg Coder J. A., 333
- Kistna*, Indian sloop, 567-8
- KITAVA ISLAND, 166, 337
- Kitkun Bay*, US escort carrier, 530, 533, 586-7
- Kiwi*, New Zealand corvette, 273
- Kiyokawa Maru*, Japanese seaplane tender, 6, 10
- Kiyoshima*, Japanese destroyer, 520, 540
- Kizan Maru*, Japanese ship, 324*n*
- KLANDASAN, 646-8, 651-2
- KLIAS, CAPE, 642
- KLIAS PENINSULA, 636, 645
- KLOPPER, Maj-Gen H. B., 97
- KNIGHT, Capt A. V., comds *Lithgow*, 244, *Westralia*, 338, 396, 404-5, 482, 578*n*
- KNOX, Cdr G. F. E., 604, 663
- Koala*, Australian boom vessel, 712
- KOBE (Sketch p. 662), 193, 297, 663-4
- KOBORI, Maj-Gen, 699
- KODIAK ISLAND, 81, 84
- KOEPANG, 176, 222-3, 693-4
- Kofuku Maru*; *see* *Krait*
- KOGA, Adm M., 395, 398, 412-14, 497
- KOISO, General Kuniaki, 478
- Kokai Maru*, Japanese gunboat, 10
- KOLI POINT, 153, 162
- KOLOMBANGARA ISLAND, 278-9, 288-90, 309
- KOMOLL, Lt-Cdr S. B., 245-6
- KONDAKANIMOKA ISLAND, 634
- KONDO, Vice-Adm N., 13, 56, 81, 84, 230, 234-5, 518*n*
- Kongo*, Japanese battleship, 13, 57, 228, 230, 457, 498, 517-18, 530, 595
- Kongo Maru*, Japanese gunboat, 6*n*, 9
- KONING, Capt, 283-4
- KONOYE, Prince, 497
- Kookaburra*, Australian boom vessel, 712
- KORIM BAY, 424, 429, 433-4
- KORO ISLAND, 124-5
- Korowa*, Australian minesweeper, 708, 712
- KORUNAT ISLAND, 365, 377
- KOSSOL PASSAGE, 513
- KOSSOL ROADS, 513, 536, 579
- Kotoku Maru*, Japanese transport, 120
- Koumoundouros*, Greek ship, 208-9
- Kowarra*, Australian ship, 254-6, 259, 557*n*
- KRA ISTHMUS, 351, 659
- Krait*, Australian ship, in Singapore raid, 317-25, 543-4; at Ambon surrender, 698
- KRUEGER, General Walter, 335, 338, 405, 461, 480-1, 494, 539, 575, 580, 594
- KUCHING (Sketch p. 618), 649, 689-90
- Kujawiak*, Polish destroyer, 93
- KUKUM, 129, 130*n*, 136, 153, 162
- KULA GULF, 279, 288-9
- Kumano*, Japanese cruiser, 12, 14, 498, 517-18, 530; sunk, 532
- KURE, 61, 395, 505, 663-5
- KURE ATOLL, 80
- KURIBAYASHI, Lt-Gen T., 598
- KURILE ISLANDS (Map p. 678), 497, 576
- Kurimarau*, British motor vessel, 242
- KURITA, Vice-Adm T., 14, 18, 21-2, 81, 86, 228, 457, 498-9, 505, 517-21, 525, 527, 529-34
- KUROSHIMA, Capt K., 3
- Kuru*, Australian naval tender; Timor operations, 176-8, 213-18, 222; rescues *Patricia Cam* survivors, 266
- KUSAKA, Vice-Adm Jinichi, 347, 685
- Kuttatubul*, Australian depot ship, 66, 70, 72-4; casualties, 262, 712
- KWAJALEIN ATOLL, 5, 28, 350, 364, 367-9, 397, 435
- KYAUKNIMAW, 570
- KYAUKPYU, 567-8, 570
- Kybra*, Australian tender, 77*n*, 257
- Kyokusei Maru*, Japanese ship, 270
- Kyujō*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 498
- KYUSHU (Sketch p. 662), 350, 604, 606, 609, 611, 617, 665-6, 677
- KYWEDE RIVER, 559-60
- LABUAN ISLAND, 636-8, 689-90; operations at, 640-2
- LABUHANRUKU, 12
- LACCADIVE SEA, 382
- Lachlan*, Australian frigate; Tarakan, 620, 622-3; Brunei Bay, 638-41, 644-5
- Laconia*, British ship, 207
- LADE, AB A. W., 584*n*
- LAE (Map p. 263; Sketch p. 7), 5, 9-10, 113-14, 117, 127, 133*n*, 264, 270-2, 275, 286, 331, 370, 491, 578; Japanese invasion of, 6; Allied plans for seizure, 276, 284, 309, 326-7; captured, 328-30
- Laffey*, US destroyer, 233
- LAMBERT, CAPE, 270
- Lamerton*, British destroyer, 202
- LAMPEDUSA ISLAND, 304
- Lamson*, US destroyer, 4, 10, 288, 290, 338, 539
- LANCASTER, Lt-Cdr M. W., 684
- LANDING CRAFT, 277-8, 304, 338-40, 447. Daihatsus, 290
- LANGEMAK BAY 370, 437-9, 441, 490, 492-3, 542-3
- Laplace*, British ship, 209
- LARAT ISLAND, 213
- LARKIN, AB R. K., 282
- LARS HALVORSEN & SONS PTY LTD, 104*n*, 218*n*
- LATHAM, AB F. G., 291*n*
- Latrobe*, Australian corvette, 104*n*, 295*n*; New Guinea, 264, 269*n*, 541*n*; 24th MS Flotilla, 265*n*, 266, 550*n*; Balikpapan, 657; at Japanese surrender, 696, 698-9
- LAUNCELOT, Sgt, 396*n*, 406-7
- Launceston*, Australian corvette, 295*n*; on East Indies Station, 35*n*; with Eastern Fleet, 203-4, 206, 382-3; 22nd MS Flotilla, 573; Hong Kong, 684
- Laurabada*, HMAS, 115
- Lauriana*, Australian naval patrol boat, at Sydney, 68, 74; Milne Bay, 281
- La Valette*, US destroyer, 400, 427
- LAYTON, Adm Sir Geoffrey, 13, 16, 18-19, 358
- LCS60*, US landing craft, 644
- LEAHY, Fleet Adm W. D., 661*n*
- Leander*, New Zealand cruiser, 4, 10, 289
- LEARY, Gnr A. N., 679*n*
- LEARY, Vice-Adm H. F., 47, 50*n*, 105, 126, 134, 167, 172-3, 211-12, 221, 236; Comanzac, 4, 8*n*; comds South-West Pacific Forces, 34
- LEATHAM, Admiral Sir Ralph, 300
- LEBANON, 313, 600
- LE CLERC, General Jacques, 681
- LEE, Vice-Adm W. A., 230, 232, 234, 236, 455-6
- LEE-STEERE, Lt R. V., 393*n*
- Leeuwin*, HMAS, 553
- LEEWIN, CAPE, 553, 570-1, 574
- Le Fantasque*, French destroyer, 446

- Le Fortune*, French destroyer, 301n  
 LEGG, Lt-Cdr W. I. L., 242  
 LENGGO CHANNEL, 129, 137, 153, 232  
*Leonardo da Vinci*, Italian submarine, 296, 355n  
 LEROS ISLAND, 313-14  
*Le Terrible*, French destroyer, 446  
*Le Triomphant*, French destroyer, 252-3, 287  
 LEVER, Lt L. C. G., 301, 550, 695  
 LEVY, Sub-Lt K., 584n  
 LEWIS, Essington, 370  
 LEWIS, Lt R. R., 218n  
*Lexington* (1), US aircraft carrier, 3, 5, 8-9, 41, 51, 52-3  
*Lexington* (2), US aircraft carrier, 451, 457, 495  
 LEY, Lt F. H. R., 224  
 LEYTE (Map p. 502; Sketch p. 580), 444n, 479-80, 487-9, 493, 499, 541, 575-9, 591-7, 600, 602-3, 607, 611-14, 616-17, 620, 639, 662; preparations for attack on, 494-7; operations at, 500-40  
 LEYTE GULF (Map p. 502; Sketch p. 580), 496-7, 499, 500, 504, 506, 508, 513, 515-16, 518, 520-1, 531, 535, 539, 579-80; Battle of, 529-34  
 LIBYA (Sketch p. 300), 39n, 99, 112, 115, 200, 262  
*Liddle*, US transport, 539, 654  
 LIFE JACKETS, 128, 621  
 LIGHTNING OPERATION, 562  
 LILIAMO, CAPE, 485  
 LILLIPUT OPERATION, 239-42, 262, 268-9, 280  
*Limerick*, British ship, 255-6, 259, 557n  
 LINDENHAFEN, 336-7  
 LINE OPERATION, 187  
 LINGAYEN (Sketch p. 588), 577, 587-8, 591-2, 595-6  
 LINGAYEN GULF (Sketch p. 588), 540, 575-9, 582, 584-6, 592-4, 597, 602; US landings in, 588-91  
 LINGGA ARCHIPELAGO, 317-18, 321-2, 545, 691  
 LINGGA ROADS, 415, 498, 505, 517, 595  
 LINGKAS, 619-21  
 LINOSA ISLAND, 304  
*Liscome Bay*, US aircraft carrier, 348  
*Lismore*, Australian corvette, 295n, 315n; East Indies Station, 35n; with Eastern Fleet, 101, 185, 203, 206-7, 298; 21st MS Flotilla, 301-2, 550-1; in Mediterranean, 304-7, 314; Pacific, 572; casualties, 712  
 LITCHFIELD, Lt-Cdr H. A., comds *Kalgoorlie*, 177, 220, 222  
 LITCHFIELD, Col J. C. D., 175  
*Lithgow*, Australian corvette, 295n, 549n, 550n; New Guinea, 244-6, 262, 269n, 436n, 440-1, 541n, 635; searches for *Centaur* survivors, 258; at Japanese surrender, 685-6; casualties, 712  
 LITTLE, Adm Sir Charles, 59, 190-1  
 LITTLE, Cdr C. G., 633; comds *Shepparton*, 326-7, Hydrographic Group, 650, 656  
 LITTLE, Lt-Cdr J. M., 683  
*Littorio*, Italian battleship, 38, 92  
*Liverpool*, British cruiser, 91  
 LIVINGSTON, Cdr E. W., comds *Westralia*, 578, 587, 620  
*Lloyd*, US transport, 638, 640, 654  
 LLOYD, Maj-Gen C. E. M., 688n  
 LLOYD-JONES, Lt D. B., 573, 684  
 LOCKWOOD, Vice-Adm C. A., 121n, 221, 517  
*Loitan*; see *Nankin*  
*Lollita*, Australian channel patrol boat, at Sydney, 66-7, 70; casualties, 712  
 LOMBOK ISLAND, 319, 324  
 LOMBOK STRAIT (Sketch p. 320), 318-21, 324, 390, 419, 544-5, 636  
 LOMBRUM POINT, 378  
*London*, British cruiser, 391, 401n, 417, 505  
 LONDON, 19, 55, 108, 110-11, 190, 200, 469, 597  
*Long*, US minesweeper, 374  
 LONG, Lt A., 440  
 LONG, G. M., 441n, 489n, 628n, 643n, 651n, 656n, 657, 658n, 682n, 689n, 699n  
 LONG, Cdr R. B. M., 5, 8, 31, 122, 238, 317-18, 332  
*Long Beach*, US frigate, 103  
*Long Island*, US aircraft carrier, 162  
 LONG ISLAND (Map p. 263), 270-2, 325, 344  
 LONSDALE, POINT, 708  
 LORD, Chief Stoker R. E., 21n  
 LORENGAU, 114, 372, 379  
 LORIENT, 209, 295  
*Lorinna*, Australian ship, 269n  
*Lorraine*, French battleship, 301n  
 LOS NEGROS ISLAND, 371-80  
*Lossiebank*, British ship, 255n  
 LOUD, AB M. S., 584n  
 LOUD, Cdr W. R., 496, 500, 579  
 LOUISIADIE ISLANDS (Sketch p. 48), 42, 46, 49, 51, 53, 328  
*Louisville*, US cruiser, 9, 495, 522, 525, 528, 531, 582n, 591-2  
 LOURENCO MARQUES (Sketch p. 188), 189, 210, 296  
 LOYALTY ISLANDS, 125  
*LST469*, US landing ship, 259, 261, 557  
*LST585*, US landing ship, 624  
 LUKIS, Air Cdre F. W. F., 121  
 LULUAI POINT, 634  
 LUNGA POINT (Map p. 148), 88, 118, 122-3, 129-30, 139, 161, 167, 226, 231-2  
*Lupo*, Italian destroyer, 201n  
 LUTONG, 643  
*Lutzow*, German pocket battleship, 250-1  
 LUZON ISLAND (Sketches pp. 580, 588), 412, 453, 468, 478-9, 499, 506, 517, 520, 529, 532, 536, 538-9, 575, 594-5; invasion of, 576-93  
*Lydia M. Childs*, US ship, 256, 259, 557n  
*Lyman Stewart*, US ship, 355  
 LYON, Admiral Sir George D'Oyly, 293  
 LYON, Lt-Col I., 318-19, 323, 543, 545, 691-2  
*Maatsuyker*, Netherlands ship, 240n, 269n  
 MACARTHUR, General of the Army Douglas, 39n, 40, 42-3, 46, 112, 116-17, 121, 135, 158n, 168, 170, 176, 181, 190, 240, 247, 276-7, 290, 331, 335, 362, 365, 367, 371-3, 400, 405, 407, 410-11, 473-4, 481, 484, 486, 493, 506, 520, 521n, 572, 575, 577, 579, 586, 591, 605, 640-1, 652, 654, 661, 667; appointed Supreme Commander SWPA, 31; on relative importance of European and Pacific theatres, 32, 109; directives to, 32-4, 347, 397-8; on US bombing of Allied ships, 50n; communiqués and publicity, 54-5, 408; on defence of Australia, 55-6; relations with Admiral King, 100; Pacific strategy, 106-11, 126, 223, 236, 341, 346, 366, 415, 441, 460; and airfield development, 114-15, 118; dispatches naval forces to Milne Bay, 171, 173; seeks naval support for New Guinea operations, 225-6; offensive in Solomons and New Guinea, 284; reconquest of Philippines, 478-80, 489-90, 494, 496, 509-10, 513, 515-16, 536, 594-5; role of British Pacific Fleet, 616; designated C-in-C US Army Forces, Pacific, 617; on proposal for British Commonwealth Force, 668; plans occupation force for Japan, 677, 679; accepts Japanese surrender, 680-1, 683  
 MACASSAR (Sketch p. 320), 320, 700  
 MACASSAR STRAIT (Map p. 502), 317, 517, 646, 652  
 MCBRYDE, Lt-Cdr J. S., comds *Ipswich*, 204-5, 305-8, 313-14, *Kalgoorlie*, 550, 614  
 MCCAIN, Vice-Adm J. S., 121, 135, 520, 531, 662-3, 674, 677  
 MCCARTHY, D., 167n, 237n, 247n  
 MCCARTHY, Lt-Col J. K., 239  
*McCawley*, US attack transport, 139, 150, 226, 231, 285  
*Maedhui*, Australian ship, 88, 116  
 MACDONALD, Lt-Cdr C., 206, 689  
 McDONALD, PO R. A. H., 21n  
 McDOWELL, Ldg Stoker J. P., 319, 321  
 McEVoy, Sgt D. G., 336  
 McEWEN, Rt Hon J., 110  
 MACFARLAN, Lt-Cdr D. S., 42, 44n, 122-3, 161  
 McGEE, Lt C. H., 640  
 MCKAUGE, Lt-Cdr R., 641  
*McKay*, British destroyer, 445  
*McKe*, US destroyer, 503n  
 MACKENZIE, Lt-Cdr C. K., 684  
 MACKENZIE, Lt-Cdr H. A., 122, 131n, 161, 232n, 274, 332, 490-1, 493  
 MACKENZIE, Lt-Cdr H. S., 545  
 MACKIE, Maj J. H., 332  
 MCKIE, Ronald, 543, 692n  
 MACKINNON, Cmdre N. A., comds *Warramunga*, 377, 407, 421, 463, 504  
 McLAREN, Lt-Cdr K. J., 327n, 628, 630, 687  
 McLAREN HARBOUR (Sketch p. 244), 246, 268  
 McLELLAN, Capt A., 76  
 MACLEMAN, Lt-Cdr D., 255

- McMAHON, Cdr O. F., 143-4, 151  
 McMANES, Capt K. M., 425, 431-3, 524-5  
 McMANUS, Cdr J. C. B., 258  
 MacMILLAN, Lt-Cdr E., 159, 204  
 McMILLAN, Sub-Lt R. L., 393n  
 McMURRAY, Capt J. R., 679n  
 McNEIL, Engr Rear-Adm P. E., 394  
 MacNICOL, Ldg Seaman J. B., 396n, 406-7  
 McNICOLL, Vice-Adm Sir Alan, 716  
 McPHEE, Lt G. J., 332  
 MacPHERSON, Capt D., 255  
 MACQUARIE LIGHT, 77-8  
 MACQUARIE'S POINT, 73  
 MACRAE, Capt M. D., 552-3  
 MADAGASCAR (Sketches pp. 188, 389), 4, 16, 37, 42, 45, 60, 64, 77, 80n, 127, 190, 193, 296-8, 355, 359, 547; British operations, 187-9  
 MADANG (Map p. 263), 245, 264, 270, 276, 281, 284, 328, 331, 381, 399, 439-40, 492, 542, 625, 627, 632-3; bombarded, 370; Australians occupy, 437-8  
 Madras, Indian corvette, 204  
 MADRAS, 20, 316  
 Madrono, Norwegian tanker, 192  
 "MAE WESTS", 128  
 MAFFIN, 411  
 MAFFIN BAY, 420, 482-3  
 MAGERI POINT, 285  
 Mahan, US destroyer, 288n, 338, 371, 539  
 MAHER, Ahmed, 600  
 Maidstone, British depot and repair ship, 676, 683-4, 700  
 MAIL, 593  
 Maimoa, New Zealand ship, 63, 706  
 MAIZURU, 664  
 MAJUNGA (Sketch p. 188), 187-9  
 MAJURO ATOLL, 368, 395, 435, 451  
 MAJUZUMI, Capt, 390  
 MAKAMBO, 153  
 MAKATA, Maj-Gen, 687  
 MAKIN, Hon N. J. O., 380  
 MAKIN ATOLL, 5, 347-8  
 MALABITA HILL, 123, 135  
 MALACCA, STRAIT OF (Sketch p. 11), 463, 505, 666, 668, 682  
 Malaita, British ship, 160, 168-9  
 MALAITA ISLAND, 45, 122-4, 135, 163-4, 227  
 MALANG, 418  
 Malaya, British battleship, 90, 251  
 MALAYA (Map p. 83; Sketch p. 11), 32n, 56, 88, 101, 109, 127, 184, 318, 363, 413, 468, 475, 489, 494, 659-60, 669; Allied strategy in, 359, 364, 467, 469, 473, 683  
 Malda, British ship, 22n  
 MALDIVES ISLANDS (Sketch p. 389), 12-13, 357, 364, 383, 386, 388, 392  
 MALOELAP ISLAND, 5, 367-9  
 MALTA (Map p. 83), 27, 30, 39, 184-6, 202, 222, 304-5, 313; convoys and supply, 2, 38, 60, 89-91, 93, 96; strategic importance, 80-1; Axis postpone assault, 97-9; relief of, 299; surrender of Italian Fleet at, 311-12  
 MAMBARE RIVER (Sketch p. 244), 245  
 Mamutu, British ship, 160, 262, 557n  
 MANAM ISLAND (Sketch p. 437), 440-1  
 MANCHURIA, 661  
 MANDALAY, 352, 558, 565, 599, 659  
 MANDERSON, H. B., 318, 694  
 MANGGAR, 646-8, 651, 656  
 Mango, US ship, 650  
 MANILA (Map p. 502), 13, 350, 479, 576, 581, 594, 599, 656; recaptured, 597  
 Manila Bay, US escort carrier, 401, 582n  
 MANILA BAY, 413, 528, 576, 586, 596-7  
 MANNING, Capt H. A., 343n  
 MAN-OF-WAR ANCHORAGE, 64-5, 70  
 MANOKWARI, 39, 399, 427  
 Manoora, Australian armed merchant cruiser, 101, 185n; recommissioned as L.S.I., 277-8; New Guinea, 396, 400, 403, 407, 416-18; Morotai, 481, 483-6; refits, 482; Philippines, 495, 501, 506-8, 578, 580, 586, 588-92; Borneo, 620-3, 638, 640-2, 646, 649-50, 652-5; casualties, 712  
 MANPOWER, 466, 667; monthly intake into Australian Services, 1944, 470-2; commitment for RN in Australia, 476  
 MANUABADA ISLAND, 168  
 Manunda, Australian hospital ship, 172-3, 260n  
 MANUS ISLAND (Map p. 263; Sketch p. 437), 366, 370-1, 396, 438, 500-1, 513, 535-7, 572, 574, 578-9, 592, 602, 604-5, 607, 613, 631, 662, 674; history and description, 365; operations at, 375, 378; developed as Allied base, 379-80  
 MAPIA ISLAND (Map p. 502), 433, 483, 489  
 MAPRIK, 625  
 MARABANG RIVER, 510  
 MARCHANT, Lt-Col W. S., 122-4, 131n  
 MARCHINBAR ISLAND, 265-6  
 MARCHINGTON, Lt-Cdr T. S., comds *Cessnock*, 197, 204, 315, 620, 687  
 MARCUS ISLAND, 5, 24  
 Marechal Gallieni, French ship, 189  
 MARIANAS ISLANDS (Map p. 502), 347, 368, 371, 397-8, 410, 414, 435, 444, 496-7, 577, 604, 661; strategic importance, 411-12, 478; Allied invasion, 451, 453-60  
 MARIBA, Pte, 396n, 406-7  
 MARINDUQUE ISLAND, 540  
 Marion Moller, British ship, 548, 561  
 MARIQUITDAQUIT ISLAND, 508-9  
 MARIVELES, 597  
 MARKHAM RIVER VALLEY, 284, 326-7  
 Marlean, Australian patrol boat, 66, 70  
 MARQUANA BAY, 326  
 MARSH, AB F. W. L., 319, 543, 692n  
 MARSH, Sgt H. E., 336  
 MARSH, Lt M. H., 584n  
 MARSHALL, General of the Army George C., 34, 108, 111-12, 116-17, 200, 225  
 MARSHALL, Maj-Gen R. J., 31, 158n  
 MARSHALL ISLANDS (Sketch p. 33), 23, 88, 111, 275, 347, 371, 435, 443, 478; US air attacks on, 5, 24; operations in, 350, 364, 367-70, 398  
 MARSHAM, Cdr H. A. L., 544  
 Martaban, British ship, 206  
 Martand, British ship, 185n  
 MARTIN, Vice-Adm Sir Benjamin, 559, 563-5, 567, 569-70  
 MARTIN, Maj-Gen C. A., 341  
 MARTIN, Seamen's Cook F., 259  
 Maryborough, Australian corvette, 35n, 203n, 295n, 315n, 549n; joins Eastern Fleet, 204; in Mediterranean, 301-2, 304-7, 312-14; Indian Ocean, 316; 21st MS Flotilla, 550-1, 572; arrives Hong Kong, 684  
 Maryland, US battleship, 3, 275, 495, 509, 522  
 MAS, Sgt, 396n, 406  
 Masaya, US ship, 280  
 MASBATE ISLAND, 529  
 MASIEN TIGA ISLANDS, 321  
 MASON, Lt P. E. A., 122-4, 132, 135, 231-2, 247, 279, 332  
 MASSEY, Claude, 268  
 MATADOR OPERATION, 567-8  
 Matafele, British ship, 168-9, 712  
 MATALALI RIVER, 627  
 MATAPAN, BATTLE OF, 147  
 MATHER, Sqn Ldr M. V., 160n  
 MATHERS, Lt M. E., 542  
 MATLOFF, M., 110n  
 Matsakumo, Japanese destroyer, 12n  
 Matsonia, US transport, 439, 461-2  
 MATSUO, Lt Keiu, 71  
 MATSUYAMA, Rear-Adm M., 40, 42, 44-5, 47, 51, 133, 166, 170-1  
 Matthew Thornton, US ship, 438  
 MAUNGDAW, 559  
 MAUNSELL, AB A. R., 513n  
 Mauretania, British transport, 36-7  
 Mauritius, British cruiser, 287  
 MAURITUS (Map p. 452), 12, 297, 355, 382, 385-6, 392, 547  
 Maya, Japanese cruiser, 14, 234, 457, 498, 517-18  
 MAYU PENINSULA, 559, 562-3, 565  
 MAYU RIVER, 559, 562-4  
 MEDDINGS, AB R., 584n  
 MEDITERRANEAN SEA (Sketches pp. 94, 300), 1-2, 5, 15, 26-7, 29-30, 38, 59, 79-80, 90, 98-9, 107, 115, 185, 199-202, 207, 249, 259, 262, 275-6, 295, 298, 301-3, 306, 308, 312, 313, 354-5, 382n, 436,

- MEDITERRANEAN SEA—*continued*  
 445, 447, 449, 611, 703, 705; U-boat activity, 35;  
 British Navy commitments and reinforcement, 60,  
 81, 358; reopened to Allies, 299-300; RAN  
 corvettes in, 312  
 MEDLEY, Lt D. J., 141  
 MEIKTILA, 659  
*Meiyo Maru*, Japanese transport, 131, 134  
 MELBOURNE (Sketch p. 33), 6-7, 28, 72, 77, 104, 117,  
 254, 258, 260, 287, 342, 549n, 551-3, 572, 574  
 MELDRUM, Lt A. C., 266  
 MELVILLE ISLAND (Sketch p. 217), 221  
 MEMPAKUL, 644-5  
 MENADO, 413, 483, 699-700  
 MENLOVE, Lt-Cdr D. A., 418  
 MENTAWIR, 657  
 MERAPAS ISLAND, 543-6, 691  
 MERAUKE, 114, 262, 264  
 MERCHANT SERVICE, casualties, 557; RAN in, 706-7  
 MERGUI ARCHIPELAGO, 10, 351  
*Merkur*, Australian virtualising stores issue ship, 104,  
 161, 497, 537, 676  
 MERRILL, Rear-Adm A. S., 279, 334  
 MERSA MATRUH, 97, 115, 262  
 MESLEY, Capt J. S., 139-44, 146n, 151n, 152; comds  
*Vendetta*, 437-8, 441  
 MESSINA, 304, 311  
 MESSINA, STRAIT OF, 308-11, 445  
*Metcalf*, US destroyer, 642-4, 649, 651  
 MEXICO, GULF OF, 26  
 MICHAELMAS OPERATION, 341  
*Michel*, German raider, 193, 198, 296-7  
*Michishio*, Japanese destroyer, 517, 523-4, 532n  
 MIDDLE EAST, 4, 15, 19, 23, 25, 27, 30, 35, 37, 99, 107,  
 184, 187, 202, 287, 705; Allied strategy and  
 planning, 2, 5, 38; convoys and supply, 36, 300;  
 Australian contribution, 100; command changes,  
 200  
 MIDDLE HEAD, 65, 73  
*Midget A*, Japanese submarine, 64, 67-8, 70, 72  
*Midget No. 14*, Japanese submarine, 64, 67, 72-4  
*Midget No. 21*, Japanese submarine, 64, 66-8, 70-1,  
 72n, 74  
 MIDWAY ISLAND (Map p. 83), 3, 23-4, 57-9, 276, 478;  
 strategic importance, 80; Battle of, 54, 60, 74n, 76,  
 79, 81-6, 88-90, 107-9, 119, 186, 497; effect on  
 Japanese, 87; heralds eclipse of battleship, 703  
 MIHO, 663  
 MIKAMI, Cdr Sakuji, 5n  
 MIKAWA, Vice-Adm Gumichi, 113, 134-5, 140-2,  
 146-7, 163, 227, 233-4, 499; estimate of, 120; in  
 Savo Island Battle, 133, 136, 149-50, 156  
*Mikuma*, Japanese cruiser, 12, 86-7  
 MILDENHALL, PO H. C., 180  
*Mildura*, Australian corvette, 161, 295n, 549n;  
 eastern Australian waters, 252-3, 260; Hong Kong,  
 683-5  
 MILES, Admiral Sir Geoffrey, 358-9  
 MILFORD, Maj-Gen E. J., 647-8, 652, 654, 657-8  
 MILICH, AB A. W., 571n  
 MILI ISLAND, 5, 368-9, 699  
 MILIM, 490-2  
 MILLER, AB F. G., 513n  
 MILLER, Lt-Col H. W., 239  
 MILLER, Capt W., 172  
 MILLET OPERATION, 505  
 MILLINGIMBI, 266  
 MILLS, Lt-Cdr C. F., 73, 280  
 MILLS, OD K. J., 571n  
 MILNE, Lt J., 628, 686  
 MILNE BAY (Map p. 263; Sketch p. 169), 114, 120,  
 134, 156, 176, 225, 236, 238-9, 242-6, 260n, 266,  
 269-70, 280, 283, 285, 292, 326-8, 330, 334, 337,  
 342, 369-70, 372-3, 375, 377-8, 380, 396, 407, 430,  
 436, 439, 628; development and reinforcement,  
 115, 240, 248, 262; convoys to, 116, 241, 268;  
 airfield construction, 118; Japanese air raids, 128,  
 281-2, landings and naval attacks, 157, 165-7,  
 172-5, 181-2, 224  
 MINDANAO (Map p. 502), 365, 397-8, 415, 420,  
 425-6, 453, 469, 479-80, 484, 487, 499, 507, 521,  
 575; Japanese airfields attacked, 506; Allied  
 landings, 600-1  
 MINDANAO SEA, 522, 528, 580, 583  
 MINDORO ISLAND (Sketch p. 580), 517, 519, 538,  
 575, 577, 580, 600, 602; Allied operations, 539-40,  
 594-6  
 MINDORO STRAIT (Map p. 502), 517, 580, 621  
 MINE DISPOSAL, 714-17  
*Minegumo*, Japanese destroyer, 279  
 MINES, 701; Australian manufacture, 105; mine-  
 sweeping, 385, 549-51, 649-50, 708-9; Borneo  
 operations, 619, 637, 643-4; aerial minelaying, 661  
*Minesweeper No. 1*, Japanese minesweeper, 44  
*Minesweeper No. 2*, Japanese minesweeper, 44  
*Minneapolis*, US cruiser, 9, 42, 121, 162, 247, 495,  
 522, 531, 589, 596-7  
 MINORGAN, Steward R. M., 291n  
 MIOS WUNDI, 463, 486, 493, 500, 517, 541, 625  
 MIRI, 636-7, 643  
*Mirrabooka*, Australian fishing boat, 160  
 MISIMA ISLAND, 46-7, 49  
 MISSION POINT, 492  
*Mississippi*, US battleship, 3, 348, 381, 495, 509,  
 522, 535, 589-90, 596, 703  
*Missouri*, US battleship, 662, 674, 679-81  
 MITCHELL, AB A. J., 587  
 MITTITA ISLAND, 483-5  
 MITSCHER, Vice-Adm M. A., 443, 451, 455-9, 495-6,  
 519-20, 529, 531-2, 604, 609  
 MITSUSHIRO, Cdr, 23-4  
 MIVO RIVER, 686-7  
 MIYAKO ISLAND, 604-5, 607, 611-12, 614  
 M.L.'s, *see* MOTOR LAUNCHES  
*Moa*, New Zealand corvette, 273, 279  
*Mobilube*, US tanker, 252  
*Mochizuki*, Japanese destroyer, 40  
 MOEM, CAPE, 628, 630-2  
 MOFFITT, Chief ERA W. R., 266  
*Mogami*, Japanese cruiser, 12, 86-7, 499, 517, 522-3,  
 525-8, 532n  
 MOGG, Lt F. R., 240  
 MOILA POINT, 686-7  
 MOKERANG PLANTATION, 378  
 MOKMER, 420, 422-3, 436  
 MOLLISON, Lt P. J., 285  
 MOLLOY, WO R. T., 245  
 MOLOTOV, M., 111, 670  
 MOLUCCA ISLANDS, 363, 434  
 MOMBASA, 77, 301  
 MOMOTE, 365, 372-3, 375, 381  
*Monaghan*, US destroyer, 43n  
 MONO, 331  
*Monssen*, US destroyer, 130, 233  
 MONTAGU BAY, 490  
 MONTAGUE ISLAND, 253  
*Montcalm*, French cruiser, 446  
 MONTE BELLO ISLANDS, 325  
 MONTE CASSINO, 447  
*Monterey*, US aircraft carrier, 531  
 MONTGOMERY, Field Marshal Viscount, 200  
*Montpelier*, US cruiser, 597, 650, 654  
 MOON, AB R. R., 484  
 MO OPERATION, 39-40  
 MOORE, AB C., 584n  
 MOORE, Rear-Adm G. D., 106, 124n, 380, 500, 675  
 MOORE, Ldg Seaman, J. J. J., 584n  
 MOORE, Lt R. A. E., 327n, 541  
 MORAN, Cdr W. T. A., 21  
 MORANDAVA (Sketch p. 188), 188-9  
*Moresby*, Australian sloop; convoy escort duty,  
 77n, 254, 257, 295; at Koepang surrender, 693-4  
 MORETON, CAPE, 75, 255, 257, 261-2  
 MORETON BAY, 254, 257, 287  
 MORGAN, Lt-Gen Sir Frederick, 448-9  
 MORISON, Rear-Adm S. E., 22n, 49, 59n, 165n, 335  
 MOROBIE, 286, 326-30  
 MOROCCO, 200n, 201  
 MOROTAI (Map p. 502), 479-82, 489, 493, 577, 620-1,  
 623, 633, 637-9, 644, 647, 649-52, 654-5, 657,  
 696-9; operations at, 483-7; Japanese surrender  
 ceremony, 688-9  
 MOROTAI STRAIT, 620-1  
*Morris*, US destroyer, 43n  
 MORRIS, Lt-Cdr B. J. B., comds Beach Unit, 620,  
 623-4, 654  
 MORRIS, Capt F. B., comds *Nepal*, 127, *Ballarat*,  
 550, 572; NOIC New Guinea, 685-6  
 MORRIS, Sgt R. G., 319

- MORROW, Cmdr J. C., 376n, 492-3, 625; comds *Arunta*, 166, 168, 172, 224
- MORSEHEAD, Lt-Gen Sir Leslie, 619, 641, 648, 652, 654, 688n
- Mortlake Bank*, Australian ship, 66
- MORTON, AB H. M., 393n
- MORTS DOCK & ENGINEERING Co, 104n, 315n
- MOSS, Lt F. R. B., 684
- Mother Snake*, HMAS 689
- MOTOR LAUNCHES: *ML413*, 439; *ML421*, 439; *ML424*, 327n, 330, 439; *ML425*, 327n; *ML427*, 327n, 628-30, 632, 712; *ML428*, 327n; *ML430*, 541; *ML801*, 327n; *ML802*, 492; *ML803*, 439; *ML804*, 627-30, 632, 687; *ML805*, 690; *ML806*, 327n, 439-40; *ML808*, 628, 630, 632, 685-6; *ML809*, 690; *ML811*, 628, 685; *ML813*, 218n; *ML814*, 218n; *ML815*, 218n; *ML816*, 327n, 439, 628-30, 632, 687; *ML817*, 326, 327n, 328-30, 439; *ML818*, 686; *ML819*, 327n, 541; *ML820*, 628, 630, 632, 686-7; *ML822*, 55n; *ML823*, 552; *ML825*, 627; *ML827*, 492-3, 541, 543; *ML829*, 564
- MOTT, Colonel G. E., 317-18
- MOULD, Lt-Cdr J. S., GC, 715
- MOULMEIN, 10, 351
- MOUNTBATTEN, Admiral of the Fleet Rt Hon Earl, 364, 387, 416, 447, 449, 467-8, 558; appointed Supreme Commander S.E.A.C., 309, 352-3; area of responsibility and plans, 358-60, 659-60 668-9, 682; accepts Japanese surrender at Singapore, 691-2
- Mount McKinley*, US amphibious force command ship, 578, 596
- Mount Olympus*, US amphibious force command ship, 577
- MOZAMBIQUE CHANNEL (Sketch p. 192), 210, 296, 357; enemy shipping attacks, 77-9, 185, 187, 202-3
- MUARA ISLAND, 637-42, 645
- MUD BAY, 182
- Mugford*, US destroyer, 6, 124, 132, 149, 153, 241, 288, 338; rescues *Centaur* survivors, 257-8
- MUIRHEAD-GOULD, Rear-Adm G. C., Flag Officer-in-Charge, Sydney, 62, 64n, 68, 70n, 71n, 72-3, 74n, 155n, 252, 267
- Mulbera*, British ship, 76
- Mullama*, British ship, 244
- Mullany*, US destroyer, 342, 369-70, 373-4, 376, 380-1, 395, 400, 406, 417, 421-2, 426, 429-31, 435, 443, 480-1, 485
- MUMMA, Cdr M. C., 329, 335
- MUNDA, 273, 278-9, 285, 288-9, 333
- MUNDAY, AB W. T., 584n
- MUNGOVEN, Lgd Writer K. J., 309n
- MUNITIONS, 104-5, 476
- MUNSON, Lt-Cdr H. G., 133-4
- Murada*, Australian ship, 159
- Murakumo*, Japanese destroyer, 167, 228
- Murasame*, Japanese destroyer, 279
- MURPHY, AB J. F., 393n
- MURPHY, Capt J. J., 336
- Murray*, US destroyer, 503n
- MURRAY, Capt G. A., 258
- MURRAY, Rear-Adm George D., 229
- Musashi*, Japanese battleship, 87, 395, 415, 435, 457, 498, 517-18; sunk, 519
- MUSCHU ISLAND, 461, 628-9, 690
- MUSSANDAM PENINSULA, 204-5
- MUSSOLINI, Benito, 27, 97-8, 298, 303, 308, 310-11, 313
- Mustika*, 545, 691
- Mutsuki*, Japanese destroyer, 40, 164
- MUZZELL, Lt-Cdr N. M., 542
- MYEBON (Sketch p. 563), 565-6
- MYERS, Colonel C.S., 267
- MYITYKIINA, 558
- Myoko*, Japanese cruiser, 40, 426, 434, 435n, 498, 517-18, 520
- NABIRE, 39
- NABUTO BAY, 699
- Nachi*, Japanese cruiser, 499, 519, 523, 527-8
- NADZAB, 326, 381, 400, 511
- NAF RIVER, 559, 561-3
- NAGANO, Fleet Adm Osamu, 133, 608
- Nagara*, Japanese cruiser, 86, 233-5
- NAGASAKI (Sketch p. 662), 673
- Nagato*, Japanese battleship, 498, 517-18, 530, 595
- Nagatsuki*, Japanese destroyer, 289
- NAGOYA (Sketch p. 662), 664
- NAGUMO, Vice-Adm C., 13-14, 18, 21-2, 57, 80-2, 84-6, 113, 163, 412, 459-60
- NAKANAI, 336
- NAKANO, Lt-Gen Hidemitsu, 270
- NAMATANAI, 699
- Nambucca*, Australian minesweeper, 708
- NAMBUCCA HEADS, 256
- NAMUR ISLAND, 367
- Nam Yong*, British ship, 557n
- NANCOWRY, 505
- Nancy Moller*, British ship, 382n, 386
- NANDI, 8
- NANGLE, W., 67
- Nankai Maru*, Japanese transport, 128, 166-7
- Nankin*, British ship, 62-3, 79, 193n
- Nanking*, 198-9
- Napier*, Australian destroyer, 126-7, 295n, 391, 662, 674-5, 677; in Indian Ocean, 16-17, 81, 188-9, 354, 397, 401n, 417; Mediterranean, 60, 90, 94; Burma operations, 559-68; with Pacific Fleet, 574, 607, 612, 679; casualties, 712
- NAPLES, 309-10, 382n, 446-7, 450
- Narbada*, Indian sloop, 565-6
- NAROOMA, 159, 553
- NARRUHN, Pte F., 349-50
- Narwick*, Polish ship, 209
- NASH, Staff Sgt B. F., 333
- Nashville*, US cruiser, 334, 342, 344, 369-70, 372, 375, 377, 381, 400, 407, 417n, 423-4, 426, 479-81, 484-6, 509, 513, 515, 521n, 535, 539, 637, 639, 651, 654-5
- NASSAU BAY, 284-6
- NASUGBU, 597
- Natoma Bay*, US escort carrier, 401
- Natsugumo*, Japanese destroyer, 228
- NATUNA ISLAND, 690
- NAURU ISLAND, 36, 39, 54, 75, 165, 381, 393n, 677, 694-6
- Nautilus*, US submarine, 86
- NAVY, ARMY AND AIR FORCE INSTITUTES, 314, 476n
- NDENI, 120, 163, 229
- NDRILO ISLAND, 365, 377-8
- NEGROS ISLAND (Sketch p. 580), 453, 496, 519, 521-3, 528, 539, 602-3
- Nellore*, Australian ship, 392-3
- Nelson*, British battleship, 304, 683, 692
- NELSON, Ldg Seaman C. L., 393n
- NELSON, CAPE, 239-40, 243, 245, 268-9, 327, 550
- Neosho*, US oiler, 43-6, 49
- Nepal*, Australian destroyer, 191, 295, 574; with Eastern Fleet, 127, 188, 210, 354, 357, 382, 391, 397, 401n, 417, 559-66, 568-70; in South Atlantic, 208n, 209; in Pacific, 607, 612, 662, 664
- NEPTUNE OPERATION, 444-5
- NEPTUNE POINT (Sketch p. 437), 439
- NESBITT, R. H., 106
- Nestor*, Australian destroyer; Indian Ocean, 17, 81; Mediterranean, 60, 91; loss of, 93-6; casualties, 712
- Nestor*, Australian motor boat, 68
- NETHERLANDS, THE, 32, 108n, 166n
- NETHERLANDS ARMY, 176, 180n, 211-15, 219-20
- NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES, I, 56, 88, 101, 109, 317, 494, 497, 576, 608, 619, 636-7; in Allied strategy, 362-5
- NETHERLANDS INDIES CIVIL AFFAIRS, 699
- NETHERLANDS NAVY, ROYAL, 35n, 190, 211, 417n, 444, 450
- Netravati*, HMIS, 206
- Neuralia*, British transport, 12
- NEUTRAL BAY, 65, 70
- NEW BRITAIN (Map p. 263; Sketch p. 339), 9, 41, 45, 117, 238, 270, 275-6, 284, 331, 334, 348, 397, 412, 441, 489, 577, 659, 667; Japanese invasion, 113, 264, 396n; Allied operations, 335-41, 346, 366, 381, 490-3, 625-6; surrender ceremony, 685
- NEW CALEDONIA (Sketch p. 33), 4, 8-9, 23, 56-8, 61, 87, 112, 119, 121, 126, 153, 254, 578; Allied reinforcement, 5-6, 10
- Newcastle*, British cruiser, 60, 81, 92, 385, 387, 401n, 559, 568-9
- NEWCASTLE (Sketch p. 79), 31, 62, 64, 72n, 75, 104n, 158-9, 252, 255-6, 549n, 551; shelled by Japanese, 77-8

- Newcomb*, US destroyer, 528  
**NEW DELHI**, 358  
*Newfoundland*, British cruiser, 630-1, 664, 673-4, 679  
**NEW GEORGIA ISLAND** (Sketch p. 48), 42, 134, 150, 273, 277-8, 284, 490; operations on, 288-90  
**NEW GUINEA** (Map p. 263; Sketch p. 33), 4, 9, 33, 37, 41, 45-6, 56, 58, 76, 77n, 88, 100, 109-11, 115, 117-19, 166, 187, 225-6, 236-7, 241, 247-8, 262, 265, 269-70, 272-3, 279, 282, 285-6, 290, 309, 326, 365-6, 410-13, 465, 478, 481, 482n, 489, 577-8, 625, 667; Japanese invasion, 6, 8, 113, 157; operations, 23-4, 39, 264, 280, 284, 326, 381, 397, 399, 415-17, 419-20, 436, 438-9, 441, 460-1, 626, 659; airfield development, 114; Allied convoys and supply, 158n, 181, 262, 264, 266; enemy supply, 249, 262, 264; Casablanca Conference decisions, 275; Australians relieve US forces, 490, 493; RAN small ships, 541-3; Japanese surrender 690  
**NEW GUINEA, DUTCH** (Sketch p. 421), operations in, 396-409  
**NEW HEBRIDES** (Sketch p. 291), 4-5, 8, 10, 112-13, 125-6, 153, 161, 470  
**NEW IRELAND** (Map p. 263), 117, 134, 156, 161, 275, 365, 381; surrender at, 699-700  
*New Jersey*, US battleship, 495, 519-20  
*New Mexico*, US battleship, 3, 381, 583-4, 589, 595  
*New Orleans*, US cruiser, 6, 42, 121, 162, 247  
**N.S.W. STATE DOCKYARD**, 104n  
**NEW ZEALAND** (Map p. 83), 4-5, 31-2, 36, 105, 107, 108n, 116, 121, 186, 349, 466, 470, 666, 695  
**NEW ZEALAND ARMY**, 37, 97, 326, 331, 366-7  
**NEW ZEALAND NAVY**, 63, 105, 273  
**NGAIBOR**, 213  
**NGGELA CHANNEL**, 129, 137  
*Nicholas*, US destroyer, 290-1, 480, 600, 603  
**NICHOLLS**, Lt H. M., 686  
**NICHOLS**, Capt C. A. G., 500, 512, 525n, 536-7  
**NICHOLS**, Signal Boatswain C. H., 128n  
**NICHOLS**, Capt R. F., 105, 124n, 211, 223  
*Nicholson*, US destroyer, 376-7  
**NICOBAR ISLANDS** (Sketch p. 11), 12, 397, 401, 417, 467, 560, 660, 683; attack on, 505  
*Nieuw Amsterdam*, British transport, 37, 287  
*Nigeria*, British cruiser, 387, 401n, 559, 568-9  
*Niizuki*, Japanese destroyer, 289  
**NILE DELTA**, 98-9  
**NILE RIVER**, 385n  
**NIMITZ**, Fleet Admiral C. W., 13, 32-4, 41, 53, 116-17, 171, 225, 276, 362, 400, 451, 456, 479-80, 489, 515, 520, 532, 534, 572, 575, 617, 630, 661n, 674; C-in-C Pacific Fleet, 5; Midway, 58-9, 81; Solomons, 120, 228; and British Fleet, 190, 611, 616; directives to, 347, 397, 411; Bismarcks, 366-7, 371; Philippines, 478, 496, 595; plans Japan occupation force, 677, 679; Tokyo Bay surrender, 681  
**NINIGO**, 402  
**NINGPO**, 616  
**NISHIDA**, Lt, 698  
**NISHIMURA**, Vice-Adm S., 498-9, 517, 519-25, 527-8, 532  
**NISSAN ISLAND**, 367  
*Nisshin*, Japanese seaplane carrier, 227-8  
**Nix**, Maj L. F., 242  
*Nizam*, Australian destroyer, 126, 295, 354, 662, 674, 677; in Indian Ocean, 16-17, 127, 188-9, 296, 397, 401n; Mediterranean, 60, 80, 91; South Atlantic, 190, 208-9, 297; refits, 561; struck by freak wave, 570-1; joins British Pacific Fleet, 574; Okinawa, 607, 612; Tokyo Bay, 679; casualties, 712  
**NOAKES**, Lt L. C., 341n  
**NOBES**, AB E. D., 265  
**NOBLE**, Rear-Adm A. G., 400, 402, 405, 417, 620, 647-9, 651-2  
**NOEMFOOR ISLAND** (Sketch p. 442), 413, 424, 441-3, 460  
*Nojima*, Japanese ship, 270n, 271  
**NOMURA**, Admiral, 3  
**NORAH HEAD**, 74, 708  
*Norfolk*, British cruiser, 361  
*Norman*, Australian destroyer, 126, 191, 295, 561, 662, 664; Indian Ocean, 16, 127, 188-9, 296, 354, 357, 505, 548, 560, 567; Mediterranean, 60, 80, 91; South Atlantic, 208n, 297; joins Eastern Fleet, 391; refits, 395; Burma, 559, 567-9; joins Pacific Fleet, 574; Okinawa, 607, 612-13; casualties, 712  
**NORMANBY ISLAND** (Map p. 263), 174-6  
**NORMANDY**, 386, 444-5, 447-8, 451  
**NORTH AFRICA** (Sketch p. 300), 38, 80, 89, 91, 97-9, 107, 184-5, 262, 274, 300-2, 311, 436, 464n; Axis reinforcement and supply, 2, 27, 30, 298; Allied invasion of, 112, 190, 199-200, 249, 299  
*Northampton*, US cruiser, 229, 232, 247-8  
**North Carolina**, US battleship, 4-5, 59, 121, 124, 161-2, 226  
**NORTH COAST STEAM NAVIGATION COMPANY**, 256  
**NORTHCOTT**, General Sir John, 287, 641  
**NORTH GOULBURN ISLAND**, 266  
**NORTH PACIFIC AREA**, 32  
**NORTH SEA**, 16  
**NORTH WEST CAPE**, 556  
**NORWAY**, 251, 361n, 706  
**NORWEGIAN NAVY**, 444  
*Noshiro*, Japanese cruiser, 435, 498, 517, 530  
**NOUMEA**, 6, 8, 40-1, 53, 105, 121-2, 153, 159, 161-2, 171, 225-6, 231-2, 236, 331, 451, 578; reinforced, 4, 10  
**NOVA SCOTIA**, 393  
*Nowaki*, Japanese destroyer, 435n  
**NUKUFETAU**, 348  
**NUSA BESAR**, 319-20, 325  
*Nyanle*, Australian tender, 698  
**NYMAN**, Lt-Col A. L., 700  
*O'Bannon*, US destroyer, 290, 380, 603  
**OBATA**, Lt-Gen H., 478  
**OBAYASHI**, Rear-Adm S., 457  
**OBOE OPERATION**, 618, 633, 636-7, 643-4, 646, 649  
*O'Brien*, US destroyer, 226  
**O'BRIEN**, Maj-Gen J. W., 242n  
**OBSERVATION ISLAND**, 325  
**OCEAN ISLAND**, 36, 39, 54, 165, 677; surrender at, 694-6  
**OCEAN STEAMSHIP CO. LTD**, 258  
**O'CONNOR**, General Sir Richard, 115  
**OCTAGON CONFERENCE**, 474, 479-80, 572, 575  
**ODGERS**, C., 405n  
**OFSTIE**, Rear-Adm R. A., 586  
**OHMAE**, Capt T., 120n, 127n, 133n, 147, 149, 156  
**OHMORI**, PO T., 67  
**OHTA**, Shoji, 346-7  
**OHTSUKA**, Maj-Gen, 692  
*Oi*, Japanese cruiser, 388, 390  
*Oigawa Maru*, Japanese ship, 270n, 272  
*Oite*, Japanese destroyer, 40  
*Okinami*, Japanese destroyer, 435n  
**OKINAWA** (Sketch p. 662), 379, 444n, 459, 496, 577, 595, 603-13, 615-17, 666  
*Okinoshima*, Japanese minelayer, 40, 44, 54, 165  
**OKUMIYA**, Cdr Masatake, 24n, 85n, 87n  
**OLDENDORF**, Vice-Adm J. B., 453, 487, 495, 505-6, 510, 516, 521-2, 524-5, 527, 529, 531, 533, 536, 577, 579-80, 587, 592, 594n, 595  
**OLDHAM**, Lt-Col A. G., 318  
**OLDHAM**, Rear-Adm G. C., 171-2  
*Olga E. Embiricos*, Greek ship, 382  
*Olive Cam*, HMAS, 708  
*Olivia*, Netherlands tanker, 80  
**OLONGAPO**, 596  
**OLSEN**, Lt G. L., 280  
**OLYMPIC OPERATION**, 665  
**OMAN**, GULF OF, 204-6, 295, 356, 359, 382  
**OMENATO**, 80-1  
*Ommaney Bay*, US escort carrier, 581  
**OMORI**, Vice-Adm S., 333-4  
**ONAMU POINT**, 626  
*Ordina*, Netherlands tanker, 193-7, 319, 707  
**O'NEILL**, Ldg Seaman H. E., 584n  
**ONSLow**, Capt R. F. J., 21  
**ONSLow**, Capt R. G., 604, 607  
**OOM**, Cdr K. E., comds *Whyalla*, 247, 281, Survey and Hydrographic Group, 579, 600, 620, 633  
**OPEN BAY**, 335-6, 627  
**ORAN**, 199, 201, 301, 304, 307, 445  
*Oranje*, Australian hospital ship, 66  
*Orara*, Australian minesweeper, 493, 549, 708  
*Orari*, New Zealand ship, 93  
*Orcades*, British transport, 209

- ORDNANCE POINT, 597  
 O'REILLY, Paymaster Cdr J., 155*n*  
*Orestes*, British ship, 78  
 ORFORD, CAPE, 335-6, 627  
*Orissa*, Indian corvette, 316, 384  
*Ormiston*, Australian transport, 257  
 ORMOC, 534, 538-9  
*Ormsby*, US transport, 501*n*  
 ORO BAY (Sketch p. 244), 239-40, 242, 244-7, 262, 266-70, 280, 283-4, 326, 328  
 OROTE, 458  
 ORT, 437  
 O SHIMA, 679-80  
 OSMENA, President Sergio, 513  
 OTWAY, CAPE, 4, 574, 708  
 OVERLORD OPERATION, 309, 448-50, 467, 666  
 OWEN, Lt-Cdr P. O. L., 682  
 OWEN STANLEY RANGE, 9, 118, 120, 127, 181, 266, 280  
 OWI ISLAND, 422, 427, 435  
*Oxfordshire*, British hospital ship, 676  
 OYAMA, Capt, 688  
*Oyodo*, Japanese cruiser, 534, 540, 665  
 OZAWA, Admiral J., 412, 415-16, 435, 453-60, 498-9, 505, 515, 519-21, 529, 531-4
- PACE, Cpl H. J., 544*n*  
 PACIFIC MILITARY CONFERENCE, 276  
 PACIFIC OCEAN AREA (Map p. 83), 24, 32-3, 276-7, 575  
 PACIFIC THEATRE (Map p. 83), 2, 28, 30, 37, 58, 61, 80, 84, 88, 99, 128, 186-7, 197, 199, 236, 259, 277, 326, 361, 381, 451, 473, 479, 531, 617, 676-7, 702; extent of Japanese domination, 1; Japanese strength, 3; Allied plans and strategy, 5, 8, 31-4, 108-10, 112, 225, 275, 350-3, 362, 398, 465-70, 472, 617, 666; Allied naval strength, 31, 111, 186, 190-1, 226, 228, 274, 391-2, 473, 475; defined, 32  
 PACIFIC WAR COUNCIL, 108, 110  
 PADAIIDO ISLANDS, 420, 424  
 PADAIIDORI ISLAND, 422  
 PADAS RIVER, 644  
 PAGE, Pte, 161  
 PAGE, Rt Hon Sir Earle, 106  
 PAGE, Capt R. C., 319, 323, 543, 692  
 PAGE, Lt S. S., 349-50  
 PAGODA POINT, 559, 570  
*Paine Wingate*, US ship, 160  
*Pakenham*, British destroyer, 60, 80, 287*n*  
*Paladin*, British destroyer, 60, 81, 383, 567-9  
 PALAU ISLANDS, 270, 347, 350, 395, 397-8, 410-14, 424, 454, 461, 479-81, 484, 487, 504, 513, 579  
 PALAWAN ISLAND (Map p. 502), 516-17, 580, 600, 620, 637  
 PALAWAN PASSAGE, 517  
 PALEMBANG, 384*n*, 414, 571-2, 646  
 PALERMO, 91  
 PALK STRAIT, 20  
 PALLISER, Admiral Sir Arthur, 20  
*Palma*, British ship, 382*n*, 386  
 PALMALMAL PLANTATION, 491  
 PALMER, Lt L. G., 220  
 PALM ISLAND, 241, 330  
 PALMYRA ISLAND, 8  
 PALO, 494-5, 508, 510, 513  
*Paluma*, Australian examination vessel, 238-9, 285  
 PAMALUAN, 657  
 PANAMA, 26  
 PANAMA CANAL, 59*n*  
 PANAMA SEA FRONTIER, 29  
 PANAOIN ISLAND, 495, 507-8, 510, 522-3, 527, 578*n*  
 PANAY ISLAND (Map p. 502), 453, 580, 602  
 PANCAKE HILL, 404  
 PANJANG ISLAND, 321, 323  
 PANKALAN BRANDAN, 571  
 PANTELLARIA, 93, 304  
 PAPUA (Map p. 263), 42, 100, 115, 117, 127, 262, 266, 279, 478  
 PAPUA, GULF OF, 9, 160  
 PARAGUAY, 599  
 PARAGUA ISLAND, 635  
 PARE PARE, 688  
 PARKER, Capt R. G., 95*n*  
*Parkes*, Australian corvette, 550*n*, 693-4  
 PARKINSON, AB R. J., 513*n*  
*Parramatta*, Australian sloop, 549*n*, 712  
*Parret*, British frigate, 392  
*Parrott*, US destroyer, 646  
 PARRY, Lt-Cdr G. L. B., 684  
 PARRY ISLAND, 368-9  
*Partridge*, British destroyer, 93  
 PASSERO, CAPE, 305  
 PATCH, Lt-Gen A. M., 6, 274  
*Pathfinder*, British destroyer, 391, 567-8, 570  
*Patna*, Indian sloop, 383  
*Patras*, Netherlands ship, 269*n*, 696  
*Patricia Cam*, HMAS, 265-6, 709, 712  
*Patterson*, US destroyer, 124, 138, 142-3, 145-7, 151-4, 161, 165, 173, 241, 256, 260, 288  
 PATTERSON, Lt-Cdr C. W. J., 252  
 PATTON, General G. S., 199  
 PAUL, Cdr B., 591  
*Paul Jones*, US destroyer, 646  
 PAULUS, Field Marshal von, 299  
*Pavlic*, US transport, 679  
 PAY, of RAN, 101-2  
*PC476*, US submarine chaser, 486; *PC597*, 552; *PC1121*, 441, 542; *PC1131*, 441; *PC1132*, 638  
 PEAGAM, F-O R. B., 42  
*Pearleaf*, British naval auxiliary ship, 20  
 PEARL HARBOUR (Map p. 83), 10, 13, 28, 36-7, 41, 53, 59, 61, 80-1, 84, 116, 124, 132, 226, 229, 275, 349-50, 379, 435, 451, 453, 456, 478, 497, 500, 515, 517, 532, 534, 572, 703  
 PEDJANTAN, 544-5  
 PEEL, Capt E. J., comds *Gascoyne*, 537-8, 550, 652, 657, 688  
 PEGU, 10, 659  
 PEGUN ISLAND, 489  
 PELELIU, 479, 487-8  
*Peleus*, Greek ship, 392*n*  
 PELTON, Maj G. B., 657  
 PENANG, 28, 191, 193, 202, 295, 354-5, 357, 382, 387 547-8, 683  
 PENDING JETTY, 689  
 PENDLEBURY, Lt R. M., 340  
 PENEANGAN ISLAND, 321  
*Penelope*, British cruiser, 311*n*  
 PENGLASE, OD N. G., 265  
*Pennant*, US transport, 6  
 PENNEY, Lt J. W., 439  
*Pennsylvania*, US battleship, 3, 495, 510, 522, 531, 535-6, 585, 591, 595  
*Pensacola*, US cruiser, 9, 229, 247  
 PERCIVAL, Lt-Gen A. E., 681  
*Perida*, US transport, 6  
*Period*, Australian ship, 265  
*Perkins*, US destroyer, 4, 10, 34, 41, 43, 47, 50, 52, 62, 65, 68, 70, 78, 288*n*  
 PERRIN, AB F. P., 513*n*  
*Perseus*, British ship, 382*n*  
 PERSIA, 10*n*, 184, 186  
 PERSIAN GULF (Sketch p. 389), 19, 295, 314, 354; convoys, 35, 203-5, 297-8, 356-7, 384  
 PERSONS, Maj-Gen J. C., 486  
*Perth*, Australian cruiser, 681-2, 710, 712  
 PERTH (Sketch p. 33), 191, 315, 390, 549  
 PESARO, 448  
 PESCADORES ISLANDS, 499, 595  
*Peshawur*, British ship, 316  
*Petard*, British destroyer, 287*n*, 383  
*Peter H. Burnett*, US ship, 252  
*Peter Sylvester*, US liberty ship, 553-7, 574  
 PERU, 599  
 PHELAN, Lt-Cdr B. K., 542  
*Phelps*, US destroyer, 43*n*, 52  
*Philip*, US destroyer, 638  
*Philip Doddridge*, US liberty ship, 378  
 PHILIPPINE ISLANDS (Map p. 502; Sketch p. 580), 23, 31, 33, 56, 108*n*, 109, 110*n*, 276, 350, 368, 395, 411-12, 414, 436, 470, 487-8, 493, 500, 558, 575, 579, 633, 667; Japanese plans and strategy, 410, 499; Allied plans and strategy, 465, 478-9, 481, 489, 665; Allied invasion and operations, 494, 496-7, 501, 504-5, 509-10, 516-17, 534, 536, 600-3; civil government set up, 513; dispositions of opposing naval forces, 521, 595-6; Japanese air strength, 576, 594  
 PHILIPPINE SEA (Sketch p. 580), 398, 435, 453, 478, 499, 529; Battle of, 454, 457-9, 497-8, 516-17  
 PHILLIPS, AB A. E., 291*n*  
 PHILLIPS, C., 102*n*

- PHILLIPS, Paymaster-Lt D. C., 422n  
 PHILLIPS, Admiral Sir Tom, 108-9  
 PHILLIPS, W., 389n  
 PHIPPS, Rear-Adm Sir Peter, 695  
*Phoenix*, British cruiser, 387, 505, 563, 566-9  
*Phoenix*, US cruiser, 103, 162, 165, 173, 185n, 241, 288, 342, 343n, 344, 369-73, 375, 377, 381, 400, 402, 417n, 422-3, 426, 432, 480-1, 495, 503n, 509, 522, 526, 535, 597, 600, 603, 620, 622, 637, 639, 651, 654-5  
 PHOENIX ISLANDS, 348  
 PHUKET ISLAND, 659-60  
 PICKEN, Lt-Col K. S., 652-3  
 PIE, CAPE, 404-5  
 PIEDMONT, PRINCE OF, 2, 39n  
*Pierce Butler*, American ship, 210  
 PIERSON, CAPE, 175  
 PIGSTICK OPERATION, 449  
 PILELO ISLAND, 339  
 PIM, 404  
*Pinguin*, German raider, 63  
 PIRAEUS, 393  
*Pirie*, Australian corvette, 295n, 550; commissioned, 35, 104n; New Guinea, 269n, 280; 22nd MS Flotilla, 573; Hong Kong, 684; casualties, 712  
 PIRU BAY, 698  
 PITTENDRIGH, Ldg Seaman D., 513n  
 PITU AIRSTRIP, 483  
 PITYILU ISLAND, 365, 377, 379  
 PIVA, 346  
 PIXLEY, Cdr N. D., 261, 438-9  
 PLADJU, 572  
*Platypus*, Australian depot ship, 301n, 712  
 PLUNKETT-COLE, Capt J., 139n, 142n, 143-4, 561; comds *Norman*, 548, 567, 569, 607, 613, 664  
 POAUEI PASSAGE, 365  
 "POINT BUTTERCUP", 41  
 POLAND, Vice-Adm Sir Albert, 464, 560-1  
*Polaris*, Australian survey vessel, 239, 268, 326  
 POLISH NAVY, 444, 450  
 POMPONG ISLAND, 317, 321-3  
 PONAPE, 347, 368  
 PONGANI, 239  
 PONNAGYUN, 565  
 PONTIANAK, 545, 649  
 PONTINE ISLANDS, 310  
 PONYA ISLAND, 310  
 POOLE & STEELE LTD, 104n, 315n  
*Pope*, US destroyer, 646  
 POPE, Rear-Adm C. J., NOIC Darwin, 212-19, 221-3, 315, Fremantle, 294-5, 417, 555-6  
 PORA PORA, 123  
 PORAPORA, 634  
 PORLOCK HARBOUR (Sketch p. 169), 166, 239, 241-2, 244, 246, 269  
 PORO POINT, 583  
*Porpoise*, British submarine, 544-5  
 PORTAL, Marshal of the RAF Viscount, 475  
 PORT BLAIR, 12, 127n  
*Port Brisbane*, New Zealand ship, 707  
 PORT DICKSON, 659-60, 683  
 PORT ELIZABETH, 314-16  
*Porter*, US destroyer, 231  
 PORTER, Maj-Gen S. H. W. C., 637, 641  
 PORT KEMBLA, 76  
*Portland*, US cruiser, 42, 44, 121, 229, 232-3, 495, 522, 528, 531, 591, 596-7  
 PORT MACQUARIE, 256  
*Portmar*, US ship, 259, 261, 557  
 PORT MORESBY (Map p. 263; Sketch p. 119), 7-9, 61, 76, 115, 118, 121, 124, 132, 156, 160, 165-71, 173-5, 214, 224, 236-7, 240-2, 246, 258, 266-7, 270, 279, 284, 327-8; Japanese plan capture, 5, 23, 37, 39-41, 43-53, 56, 58, 88, 119-20, 128; air raids, 42, 88, 114, 116, 157, 280-1; Allied reinforcement and supply, 63, 242, 262, 268  
*Porto Alegre*, South African ship, 209  
 PORT PHILLIP BAY, 278, 294, 551, 570, 574  
 PORT PURVIS, 330, 334  
 PORT SAID, 90, 97, 305, 312-13  
 PORT STEPHENS, 171, 277  
 PORT SUDAN, 15, 97  
 PORT SWETTENHAM, 659-60, 683  
 PORTUGUESE, THE, 214-15, 221, 224  
 PORTUGUESE EAST AFRICA, 77  
 PORT WAR SIGNAL STATION, 68, 70, 73  
*Port Wellington*, New Zealand ship, 707  
*Potrero*, Australian store ship, 168-9  
 POTSDAM CONFERENCE, 669-70, 672-4  
 POTTER, OD C. P., 513n  
 POULTON, Stoker J., 571n  
 POUND, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley, 59, 352  
 POWER, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur, 312, 401, 417, 477, 505, 554, 568, 683, 691  
 POWER, PO J. J., 224  
 POWNALL, Rear-Adm C. A., 348  
*Poyang*, Australian ship, 162, 497, 698  
*Preble*, US minelayer, 504  
*Preston*, US destroyer, 235  
 PRICE, Sub-Lt D. L., 329n  
 PRIDHAM-WIPPELL, Admiral Sir Henry, 91n  
 PRINCE ALEXANDER MOUNTAINS, 632  
*Prince of Wales*, British battleship, 108  
*Prince Robert*, Canadian armed merchant cruiser, 684  
*Princeton*, US aircraft carrier, 519  
 PRINGLE, AB N., 584n  
 PRISONERS OF WAR, *Allied*, 689-90; *Australian*, 677, 681-2, 707; *Italian*, 207, 316  
*Protée*, French submarine, 301n  
 P.T. BOATS, 327-8; *PT109*, 290; *PT122*, 249; *PT127*, 522-3; *PT131*, 522; *PT377*, 687  
 PUBLICITY CENSORSHIP, 54-5  
 PUGET SOUND, 4  
 PULAU SAMBU, 691  
 PULO WEH, 464  
*Punjab*, Indian corvette, 204  
 PURSEHOUSE, Capt L., 341n  
 PURVIS, Capt I. K., 620, 692-3  
 PURVIS BAY, 578  
 PUT PUT, 490  
 PUTTICK, Lt-Gen Sir Edward, 470  
*Quadrant*, British destroyer, 387, 401n, 548, 551, 662  
 QUADRANT CONFERENCE, 308-9, 346-7, 351n, 352, 397, 448  
*Quality*, British destroyer, 391, 464, 548, 551, 662  
 QUEBEC, conferences and decisions, 308-9, 311, 346, 352-3, 448, 474-5, 575  
*Queenborough*, British destroyer, 391, 401n, 505  
 QUEEN CAROLA HARBOUR, 6-7  
*Queen Elizabeth*, British battleship, 91n, 97, 358, 391, 401n, 416-17, 463, 559-60, 567-8  
*Queen Elizabeth*, British transport, 36-7  
*Queen Mary*, British transport, 36-7, 287, 351n, 474, 706  
*Queen of Bermuda*, British armed merchant cruiser, 287  
*Queen Olga*, Greek ship, 287n  
*Quentin*, British destroyer, 201-2  
 QUEZON, President, 110n  
*Quiberon*, Australian destroyer, 199, 295-6, 572, 662-3; in Mediterranean, 201-2; South Atlantic Station, 297; Indian Ocean, 354, 391, 397, 401n, 417, 505, 551, 561; refits, 419; Manus, 602; Okinawa, 604-5; in bombardment of Honshu, 664  
*Quickmatch*, Australian destroyer, 295n, 552-3, 572, 662-3; Atlantic, 191, 198-9, 297; Indian Ocean, 296, 354, 417, 463-4; Manus, 602; Okinawa, 604, 606-7, 611; casualties, 712  
 QUITCRAS (Sketch p. 217), 214, 224  
*Quilliam*, British destroyer, 391, 401n, 464, 505, 551, 604n, 607, 613  
 QUIN, Dr B. H., 165n  
*Quincy*, US cruiser, 59n, 121, 125, 129-30, 137-40; loss of, 147, 149, 153  
 RABAU (Map p. 263; Sketch p. 7), 6, 8-9, 40, 42-5, 47, 49-51, 53, 56, 88, 109, 114, 118-23, 125, 127-8, 134-6, 156-7, 162-4, 166, 183, 239, 245, 270, 272, 278-9, 282, 289, 326, 328, 344, 364, 370, 412-13, 441, 478, 490, 668, 687, 699-700; Japanese capture, 5, 113; recapture proposed, 110-11, 117, 238, 275-6, 284; Japanese strength and reinforcement, 131, 272-3, 346-7; Allied air attacks, 133n, 330-1, 333, 345, 347, 381; decision to bypass, 346, 365-6, 397; Japanese surrender, 685-6  
 RADAR, 124, 138, 141-2, 337, 344, 376, 422, 528, 536  
*Radford*, US destroyer, 290-1, 427, 429-30  
 RAE, Lt-Col D. F., 440



- RAEDER, Grand Admiral Erich, 3, 25-6, 98*n*, 250-1  
 RAGSDALE, Rear-Adm Van H., 400  
 RAI COAST, 341  
*Raider*, British destroyer, 392, 505, 567-9  
*Rajula*, British transport, 185*n*  
*Ralph Talbot*, US destroyer, 124, 138, 140-1, 149, 151, 153, 288, 330, 334, 337, 342, 345  
*Ramilles*, British battleship, 4, 15, 37, 64-5, 73-4  
 RAMREE CHAUNG, 570  
 RAMREE ISLAND (Sketch p. 563), 559, 565-70  
 RAMSAY, Adm Sir Bertram, 443, 451  
 RAMSAY, Cmdr J. M., 564  
*Ramses*, German ship, 197-8  
*Ranchi*, British armed merchant cruiser, 191*n*  
 RANGOON (Sketch p. 11), 10-12, 56, 59, 352, 362, 473-5, 559, 570, 666; recaptured, 659-60  
*Rapid*, British destroyer, 567-70  
 RAS AL HADD, 205-6, 356, 382, 394  
 RAS HAFUN, 392  
*Rasher*, US submarine, 414*n*  
 RATHEDAUNG, 562  
 RATMALANA, 17, 21  
 RATTRAY, AB N. A., 513*n*  
 RAVENHILL, Capt R. W., 630  
 RAWLINGS, Adm Sir Bernard, 366, 477, 604, 611, 614, 663, 674, 701  
*Rawnsley*, British ship, 255*n*  
 RAYMENT, Cdr J. F., 512, 513*n*  
 READ, Vice-Adm A. D., 559, 563, 568  
 READ, Cdr N. R.; comds *Warrnambool*, 256, *Gascogne*, 500, 535, *Whyalla*, 537, 550, *Ballarat*, 684-5  
 READ, Lt-Cdr W. J., 7-8, 122-4, 231, 279, 332  
*Recina*, Yugoslav ship, 254, 557*n*  
 RECOVERY OPERATION, 696  
 RECRUITING, 101  
*Redfin*, US submarine, 453  
*Redoubt*, British destroyer, 198-9  
*Redpole*, British sloop, 568  
 RED SEA, 15, 36, 203, 295, 359  
 REES, Lt N. O. G., 679*n*  
 REEVE, AB G. C., 584*n*  
 REFORMATORY ROAD, 692  
*Regensburg*, German supply ship, 79  
*Reid*, US destroyer, 338-9, 343-4, 371, 378, 400, 417, 427  
 REID, Alexander, 160  
 REID, Lt-Cdr H. D., 716  
 REID, Capt William, 159  
*Reijnst*, Netherlands ship, 255, 269*n*, 283  
 REKATA BAY, 135, 150  
*Relentless*, British destroyer, 385, 505  
*Remo*, Italian ship, 706  
 RENDOVA ISLAND, 279, 284-5, 288, 290  
 RENNELL ISLAND (Sketch p. 119), 45, 53, 125, 227, 229; Battle of, 273  
*Renown*, British battle cruiser, 358, 391, 401*n*, 417, 464, 477, 505, 560, 567  
*Repulse*, British battle cruiser, 108  
*Rescue*, US hospital ship, 681-2  
*Reserve*, Australian fleet tug, 261, 539, 685  
*Resolution*, British battleship, 4, 15, 287  
*Revenge*, British battleship, 4, 15, 287  
 REYMOND, Lt B. P., 349-50, 544*n*  
*Reynella*, Australian ship, 706  
*Reynolds*, British ship, 193*n*  
 REYNOLDS, W. R., 317  
 RHIO ARCHIPELAGO, 321, 323, 691  
 RHOADES, Lt-Cdr F. A., 122, 161, 285  
 RHOADES, Cmdr R., 191, 198-9, 464  
 RHODES, ISLAND of (Sketch p. 300), 313, 449  
 RHONE VALLEY, 450  
 RHYS, Lloyd, 440*n*  
 RIBBENTROP, Joachim von, 23, 310  
 RICCARDI, Admiral, 310  
 RICE ANCHORAGE, 288-9  
 RICH, Maj M. C. W., 116  
*Richard Hovey*, US ship, 382*n*, 386  
*Richard P. Leary*, US destroyer, 513  
 RICHARDS, Denis, 18*n*  
 RICHARDS, Cdr D. H., comds *Armidale*, 214, 218*n*, 219-20, 222  
 RICHARDSON, AB V. G., 571*n*  
*Richelieu*, French battleship, 299, 401*n*, 417, 464, 692  
 RICHMOND, Admiral Sir Herbert, 25*n*, 346, 704  
 RICHTHOFEN, Field Marshal, 310  
 RIDGWAY, M. 695  
 RIEFKOHL, Capt F. L., 139  
*Rigel*, US repair ship, 113, 278, 327, 338  
 RIGGS, Sub-Lt J. G. M., 544*n*  
 RIGGS, Rear-Adm R. S., 647  
 RILEY, AB G. W., 584*n*  
 RIMAU OPERATION, 543-6, 691-2  
*Ringgold*, US destroyer, 503*n*, 507  
 RING RING PLANTATION, 337  
 RIPPON, R. G., 259  
*River Burdekin*, Australian ship, 695-6  
*River Glenelg*, Australian ship, 695  
*River Snake*, HMAS, 689  
 RO 33, Japanese submarine, 40, 156, 160, 168  
 RO 34, Japanese submarine, 40  
 RO 110, Japanese submarine, 383  
 ROBBINS, Engr Sub-Lt T. F., 682  
*Robert J. Walker*, US ship, 551-3, 557  
 ROBERTS, Maj A. A., 336  
 ROBERTS, AB A. H., 564  
 ROBERTS, Col C. G., 238, 332  
 ROBERTS, Lt-Cdr F. W., 554, 628  
 ROBERTSON, Lt-Gen Sir Horace, 690  
 ROBERTSON, Capt H. W. F., 331  
 ROBERTSON, Lt-Cdr S. W. S., 501, 538  
 ROBERTSON'S POINT, 71  
*Robinson*, US destroyer, 638  
 ROBINSON, Maj E. D., 332, 490  
 ROBINSON, Sqn Ldr R. A., 284, 332-3  
 ROBISON, Lt-Cdr R. C., 178-81  
 ROBSON, Lt L., 696  
*Rock*, US submarine, 556  
*Rockhampton*, Australian corvette, 295*n*, 699; eastern Australian waters, 77; New Guinea, 436*n*, 541*n*; Ambon surrender, 698  
*Rocky Mount*, US command ship, 620, 638, 640, 642  
*Rodney*, British battleship, 304, 528*n*  
*Roebuck*, British destroyer, 387, 548  
 ROGERS, Brig J. D., 677*n*  
 ROI ISLAND, 367  
*Roma*, Italian battleship, 311  
 ROMBLON ISLAND, 600  
 ROME, 27, 259, 303, 312-13, 446-8  
 ROMMEL, Field Marshal Erwin, 2, 27, 30, 39, 89-90, 92, 97-9, 184, 200, 310-11  
*Romney*, British corvette, 307  
 RONDAHL HARBOUR, 493  
 ROOSEVELT, Franklin D., 4, 38 9, 55*n*, 56, 110-12, 199-200, 274-5, 303, 308-9, 350-1, 359-60, 450, 478, 661, 671; undertakes to hold Australia, 1-2, 58; "Beat Hitler First" policy, 34, 353; naval reinforcement of Pacific, 186-7, 475; death of, 614-15  
 ROSCOE, T., 453*n*  
 ROSE, Lt-Cdr M. G., 687, 694  
 ROSENTHAL, Capt A. S., 93, 95  
 ROSKILL, Capt S. W., 18*n*, 30*n*, 35*n*, 37*n*, 59*n*, 126*n*, 195*n*, 209*n*, 210*n*, 297*n*, 366*n*, 444*n*, 445*n*, 479*n*, 614*n*, 660*n*, 661*n*, 662*n*, 663*n*, 665*n*, 683*n*, 701*n*, 704*n*  
*Ross*, US destroyer, 506  
 ROSS, Capt D., 253  
 ROSS, Lt-Cdr E. S., 294  
 ROSS, Lt H. R., 544*n*  
 ROSS, OD V. G., 280*n*  
 ROSSEL ISLAND, 9  
 ROTTNEST ISLAND, 194  
 ROWELL, Lt-Gen Sir Sydney, 168, 170  
 ROWLEY, Ldg Seaman S. C., 584*n*  
 ROWSELL, Lt-Cdr R., 439  
 ROYAL, Rear-Adm F. B., 495, 578, 600-1, 620-3, 637-8, 641, 644-5  
*Royal Sovereign*, British battleship, 4, 15  
 ROYLE, Admiral Sir Guy, 55, 155, 211, 237, 267, 274, 277, 318, 370, 419, 471, 492, 551, 641; naval reinforcement in Pacific, 5, 275; convoy protection, 251, 253, 257; appointment extended, 380; seeks increase in strength of RAN, 472  
 RUDDOCK, Rear-Adm T. D., 535, 539  
 RUGE, Vice-Adm, 310  
*Ruler*, British escort carrier, 574, 612  
 RUMANIAN ARMY, 30  
 RUPERTUS, Maj-Gen W. H., 344  
 RURBAS ISLANDS, 422

- Rushmore*, US L.S.D., 623  
*Russell*, US destroyer, 43*n*, 44, 503*n*  
 RUSSELL, Lt C. N., 584*n*  
 RUSSELL ISLANDS, 235, 278-9, 330-1  
 RUSSIA (Map p. 83), 1-2, 16*n*, 25-6, 30, 32, 56, 98-9, 107, 111, 184, 202, 222, 249, 299, 309, 444*n*;  
   Allied aid and convoys to, 3-4, 107, 203, 250, 360-1; and Japan, 109-10, 669-70, 674  
 RUSSIAN ARMY, 37, 599  
 RUSSIAN NAVY, 456  
 RUTHERFORD, Lord, 670  
 RYAN, Gnr, 196  
 RYAN, Telegraphist W. F., 624*n*  
 RYDER, Ldg Seaman C. S., 571*n*  
 Rye, British corvette, 307-8  
*Ryoyo Maru*, Japanese transport, 120  
*Ryuhō*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 412, 458  
*Ryūjō*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 14, 21, 80, 87*n*, 88, 161; sunk, 163  
*Ryūkaku*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 40*n*, 41, 46, 55  
 RYUKYU ISLANDS, 497, 575, 603-13, 616-17
- S 38, US submarine, 133  
 S 42, US submarine, 54  
 S 44, US submarine, 156  
 SABANG ISLAND (Sketch p. 11), 12, 127*n*, 354, 356;  
   bombarded, 401-2, 463-4  
 SADAU ISLAND, 620, 622-3  
*Sagaing*, British merchant ship, 20  
 SAGAMI WAN, 679-80  
 SAGAN, 410  
 SAGU ISLAND (Sketch p. 563), 569  
 SAIDOR, 332, 341, 345-6, 369  
 SAIGON, 468, 660  
*St Aristell*, tug, 252  
 STE MAXIME, 450  
 ST GEORGE, CAPE, 134  
 ST JOHN'S ISLAND, 323  
*St Lo*, US escort carrier, 530, 532*n*, 533  
*St Louis*, US cruiser, 289, 334  
 ST MARIE, CAPE, 355  
 ST MARTIN'S ISLAND, 561, 563  
 ST NAZAIRE, 444, 548  
 ST RAPHAEL, 450  
 ST TROPEZ, 450  
 SAIPAN (Map p. 452), 81, 350, 364, 368, 380, 411-12, 435, 443, 478, 496; Allied invasion, 453-60  
 SAIPAN CHANNEL, 460  
 SAITO, Lt-Gen Y., 459-60  
 SAKISHIMA ISLANDS, 595, 604-7, 611, 613, 616  
 SAKONJU, Rear-Adm, 388-90, 425-6, 429, 433, 435  
 SALAMAU (Map p. 263; Sketch p. 7), 5-6, 9, 113-14, 117, 127, 133*n*, 272, 275-6, 279, 284, 309, 578;  
   recaptured, 326, 329, 331  
 SALAWATI ISLAND, 429, 434  
 SALAZA PLATEAU, 176  
 SALERNO, 311, 445, 447  
 SALERNO, GULF OF, 309  
*Salt Lake City*, US cruiser, 113, 121, 124, 227  
 SALUM, 97  
*Salute*, US minesweeper, 639  
 SALWEEN RIVER, 10  
 SAMARINDA, 649, 687  
 SAMAR ISLAND (Map p. 502), 454-5, 499, 521, 527;  
   Battle of, 529-34  
 SAMARAI (Sketch p. 119), 115-16, 166  
 SAMBODIA, 657  
 SAMBU, 323  
 SAMEJIMA, Vice-Adm Baron, 687  
*Samidare*, Japanese destroyer, 429, 433-4  
 SAMOA, 3, 5, 23-4, 56-8, 87, 113*n*, 119, 121  
 SAMOS ISLAND, 313  
*Samouri*, British ship, 382  
 SAMPLE, Rear-Adm W. D., 649, 651, 654  
*Sampson*, US destroyer, 421  
 SAMPSON, Lt J. C., 441*n*  
*Samuel Benbow*, Australian minesweeper, 66, 71  
*Samuel B. Roberts*, US destroyer escort, 532*n*, 533  
*Samuel Gompers*, US ship, 254, 557*n*  
 SANAGI, Capt Sadamu, 133*n*, 685  
*San Alvaro*, British tanker, 382*n*, 384-5  
 SANANANDA, 262  
 SAN ANTONIO, 596  
 SAN BERNARDINO STRAIT, 453-4, 499, 515-21, 527, 529, 531-3, 577, 600
- SAN CHRISTOBAL ISLAND, 41, 45, 53, 162, 230  
 SANDERSON BAY, 170  
*San Diego*, US light cruiser, 84, 229, 232  
 SAN DIEGO, 59, 121  
 SANDOVER, Brig R. L., 627  
*Sands*, US destroyer transport, 329*n*, 371, 376, 579  
 SANDY CAPE, 254  
 SAN FABIAN (Sketch p. 588), 577, 586-91  
 SAN FELIPE, 596  
 SAN FERNANDO (Sketch p. 588), 583, 586-7  
 SAN FERNANDO, 596  
*San Francisco*, US heavy cruiser, 9, 121, 227, 230, 232-3, 656  
 SAN FRANCISCO, 59, 256, 379, 575, 674  
 SAN FRANCISCO CONFERENCE, 599-600  
*Sangamon*, US escort carrier, 400  
 SANGRO RIVER, 446  
 SANGSTER, Lt-Cdr G. C., 698  
 SAN ISIDRO BAY, 539  
 SAN JOSE, 495, 540, 597  
*San Juan*, US cruiser, 59*n*, 121, 125, 130, 132, 137-8, 150-1, 153, 162, 229, 231  
 SANKEY OPERATION, 568  
 SAN NARCISO, 596  
*San Nicholas*, US ship, 327  
 SAN PEDRO BAY, 494, 506, 521*n*, 527, 537-8, 579, 607, 613  
 SAN RICARDO, 494, 508, 510  
 SANSAPOR (Sketch p. 442), 460, 463, 480-1, 483, 489, 578  
 SANTA CRUZ ISLANDS (Philippines), 600-1  
 SANTA CRUZ ISLANDS (Solomons), 117, 120, 123, 163;  
   Battle of, 191, 229-31  
 SANTA YSABEL ISLAND (Sketch p. 43), 42, 44, 122, 134-5, 284  
*Santee*, US escort carrier, 400, 511*n*, 533  
 SANTIAGO ISLAND, 585  
 SAPO, CAPE, 638, 640  
 SARANGANI BAY, 479  
*Saratoga*, US aircraft carrier, 3, 52*n*, 59, 84, 121, 124, 162-5, 226*n*, 275, 391, 401-2, 412, 416-19  
 SARAWAK (Sketch p. 618), 636, 689  
 SARDINIA, 91, 298, 303, 311, 446  
 SARGENT, Lt A. L., 544*n*  
 SARMI, 39, 408-11, 415-17, 420, 481  
 SARMI, CAPE, 492  
 SASAKI, Capt Hankyu, 40, 64-5  
*Satinleaf*, US ship, 638  
 SATO, Naotake, 669-70  
 SATO, Rear-Adm Shiro, 690  
 SAUMLAKI (Map p. 263), 211-13  
 SAUNDERS, Hilary St G., 18*n*, 21*n*  
 SAUNDERS SHOAL, 564  
 SAVAGE, Lt Ellen, 258  
 SAVAGE ISLAND, 564  
 SAVAGE, Lt-Gen Sir Stanley, 686-7  
*Savo Island*, US escort carrier, 582*n*  
 SAVO ISLAND (Map p. 148), 44*n*, 125-6, 128*n*, 129, 132, 138, 161-2, 227, 232-5, 292; Battle of, 136-55, 227, 273, 434-5, 499  
 SAWAR, 411, 416-17  
*Sawokla*, US ship, 193  
*Saxifrage*, British corvette, 306  
*Sazanami*, Japanese destroyer, 40, 47  
*SC703*, US submarine chaser, 404; *SC732*, 638; *SC738*, 254; *SC741*, 638; *SC746*, 269*n*; *SC747*, 254-5; *SC749*, 441; *SC750*, 269*n*, 283  
 SCANLON, Brig-Gen Martin F., 115  
 SCAPA FLOW, 292-3, 307, 358  
*Scharnhorst*, German battleship, 251, 360-1  
 SCHOUTEN ISLANDS (Sketch p. 421), 411, 420-5  
*Schroeder*, US destroyer, 503*n*, 507  
 SCHWARZ OPERATION, 311  
 SCOTT, Rear-Adm N., 138, 162, 227-8, 231-3  
*Scylla*, British cruiser, 445  
*Seahorse*, US submarine, 454-5  
 SEALARK CHANNEL, 129, 137, 167  
*Sea Mist*, Australian patrol boat, 66, 70-1, 74  
 SEARLE, Capt L. K., 336  
 SEARLE POINT, 569  
*Sea Witch*, US ship, 171  
*Sebastian Cermeno*, US ship, 297  
 SEEDLER HARBOR, 365, 401, 416, 441-2, 460-1, 462*n*, 480, 483, 537, 579, 602, 605*n*, 663; operations at, 372, 374, 377-9

- SEGI, 279, 284-5  
 SEGOND CHANNEL, 153  
 SEK ISLAND, 438  
 SELATAN, CAPE, 317  
*Selene*, British submarine, 660  
*Selfridge*, US destroyer, 77, 124, 129, 149, 151-3, 161-2, 165, 173-4, 241, 288  
 SELLECK, AB H. L. E., 582*n*  
*Selma City*, US ship, 22*n*  
 SEMOI RIVER, 657  
*Sendai*, Japanese cruiser, 234-5, 334  
 SENDAI, 674, 681-2  
 SENTANI, LAKE, 399, 404, 408, 429  
 SEPAKU RIVER, 657  
 SEPIK RIVER, 411*n*, 440-1  
 SEPINGGANG, 646-8  
 SERIA (Sketch p. 618), 618, 636, 643  
 SESAJAP RIVER, 618  
 SETON, Capt C. W., 232*n*, 331, 634  
 SEVEN MILE AERODROME, 114*n*, 157  
 SEYCHELLES ISLANDS, 12, 60, 547  
 SEYMOUR, Cdr W. J., comds *Gawler*, 204, 301*n*, 302, 305-6, 308, 314-16, 393-4  
*Shah*, British escort carrier, 547  
*Shamrock Bay*, US escort carrier, 586  
 SHANGHAI, 197, 413  
*Shangri-la*, US aircraft carrier, 662  
 SHARIAH, 206, 356  
 SHARK BAY, 556  
 SHARMAN, AB I. S., 584*n*  
 SHARPE, OD R. H., 513*n*  
 SHAW, US destroyer, 338  
 SHAW, Sig A. S., 21*n*  
 SHAW, Cdr N. H., 396, 482  
 SHEAN, Lt-Cdr M. H., 660  
 SHEEAN, OD E., 218  
 SHEEHAN, Maj-Gen E. L., 492, 685  
*Sheffield*, British cruiser, 250, 361, 528*n*  
*Sheldon Jackson*, US ship, 261  
*Shepparton*, Australian corvette, 295*n*; New Guinea, 285, 326-9, 436*n*  
 SHERMAN, Rear-Adm F. P., 518-20, 681  
 SHIGEMITSU, Mamotu, 680-1  
*Shigure*, Japanese destroyer, 40, 426, 429, 434, 517, 522-3, 525, 527-8  
*Shikunami*, Japanese destroyer, 234, 270*n*, 271-2, 426, 429, 433-4, 435*n*  
 SHIMA, Vice-Adm K., 40, 42, 44-5, 54, 498-9, 503, 519, 523, 525, 527-8  
 SHIMADA, Admiral, 414  
*Shimakaze*, Japanese destroyer, 435*n*  
*Shinai Maru*, Japanese ship, 270*n*  
*Shinano*, Japanese battleship, 87  
 SHINCHIKU AIRFIELD, 607  
 SHINGLE OPERATION, 449  
 SHINKAWA, Lt-Cdr, 687  
 SHIPBUILDING, 104  
 SHIPPING, *Allied*: 15, 27-8, 32, 237, 268, 283; attacks on, 22, 26, 29, 61-3, 74-9, 158, 185, 191-3, 208-10, 249, 251*n*, 262, 296-7, 299*n*, 354-7, 381-90, 392-4; wartime requirements and shortages, 25, 35-6, 187, 298, 359, 449; convoy systems, 77; defensive armament and mine protection, 104. *Enemy*: 187; losses, 299, 398, 414, 661  
 SHIPWAY, Lt H. C., 327*n*  
*Shirakumo*, Japanese destroyer, 12*n*, 14*n*  
*Shiranuhi*, Japanese destroyer, 14*n*  
*Shiratsuyu*, Japanese destroyer, 40, 429, 433-4  
*Shirayuki*, Japanese destroyer, 270-1  
 SHO-GO OPERATION, 497-9, 504-5  
*Shoho*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 40-1, 45, 55; sunk, 47, 87*n*  
*Shokaku*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 13, 40-1, 46, 51-2, 54-5, 87*n*, 88, 161, 163, 230-1, 412; sunk, 458  
*Shoreham*, British sloop, 305, 307-8, 314, 563, 565  
 SHORTHAM, Pte G., 396*n*, 406  
 SHORTLAND ISLAND (Sketch p. 634), 123, 135, 163-4, 227, 232*n*, 233, 235, 247-8, 279, 332, 633-4  
 SHORTUS, Lt V. T., 492  
 SHOWERS, Rear-Adm H. A., 292, 500, 593; comds *Hobart*, 124, *Shropshire*, 416  
*Shropshire*, Australian cruiser, 103, 307, 330, 370, 381, 527*n*, 537, 605*n*, 630, 676; transferred from RN, 292-3; New Guinea area, 334, 342-4, 369, 375, 377, 400, 402, 404, 406, 416, 417*n*, 421, 423, *Shropshire*, Australian cruiser—continued  
 460-3, 500; refits, 423-4, 442, 602-3; Morotai, 480-1, 485; Philippines, 495, 504, 506-7, 509-14, 531, 534-6, 579, 581, 583-5, 589, 591-4, 596-7, Battle of Surigao Strait, 522, 525-6; Borneo, 642-4, 649-52, 654-6; Japan, 680-1; casualties, 712  
 SHUGG, W., 165*n*  
 SHUTE, Steward B. M. P., 635*n*  
*Sianta*, Netherlands ship, 557*n*  
 SIBERT, Lt-Gen F. C., 513  
*Sibigo*, Netherlands ship, 707  
 SIBUTU PASSAGE, 621  
 SIBUYAN ISLAND, 519  
 SIBUYAN SEA, 519-20, 529  
 SICILY (Sketch p. 300), 30, 91, 96, 249, 274, 302-4, 310, 447; Allied invasion, 305-6, 308, 311, 445  
 SIDNEY, AB J., 393*n*  
*Sigsbee*, US destroyer, 503*n*, 507  
 SILALAH, Amir, 691  
*Silksworth*, British ship, 22*n*  
 SILVESTER, Rev. A. W., 289  
 SIMARA ISLAND, 600  
 SIMON, Lt F. D., 282*n*  
 SIMONSTOWN, 190, 208-9  
 SIMPSON, Lt-Cdr J. H., 197, 204, 550  
 SIMPSON HARBOUR, 686  
*Sims*, US destroyer, 9, 43*n*, 46, 679  
 SINCLAIR, Cdr J. L., 240, 242  
 SINCLAIR, Capt R. D. C., 21  
 SINGAPORE (Map p. 502; Sketch p. 320), 1, 11-12, 31, 32*n*, 56, 59, 101, 240, 317, 346, 357, 359, 363, 397, 412, 414-15, 473, 475, 489, 515, 595, 599, 619, 637, 659-60, 669, 677, 683, 692-3; Jaywick operation, 317-25; enemy reinforcement, 364, 387; Rimau operation, 543-6, 691-2  
 SINGKEP ISLAND, 691-2  
*Sinkiang*, British ship, 22*n*  
*Sinkoku Maru*, Japanese tanker, 324  
 SIO, 345-6  
 SIPOSAI ISLAND, 634-5  
*Sirius*, British cruiser, 201, 311*n*  
 SIRTE, BATTLE OF, 38, 89  
 SITAPAROKIA HILL, 561  
*s' Jacob*, Netherlands ship, 166*n*, 171-3, 269  
 SKINNER, Capt J. K., 482*n*  
 SKINNER, Maj R. L., 336  
 SKULLY, AB Gunner J. G., 254  
 SLIM, Field Marshal Rt Hon Viscount, 565  
*Slinger*, British aircraft carrier, 554-5  
 SLOT, THE, 134-5, 227, 234-5, 273, 289-90  
 SMART, Sub-Lt J. L., 690*n*  
 Smith, US destroyer, 231, 288*n*, 338, 343-4, 371, 376  
 SMITH, AB A. C. S., 291*n*  
 SMITH, Lt D. A. P., 628, 686  
 SMITH, OD F. F., 220  
 SMITH, Lt-Gen H. M., 454, 460  
 SMITH, Lt L. K., 439  
 SMITH, AB S. R., 635*n*  
 SMITH, Lt-Cdr W. A., 657, 696  
 SMOKY CAPE, 261, 557  
 SMOOT, Rear-Adm R. N., 525-8  
 SMUTS, Field Marshal Rt Hon J. C., 37*n*  
 SNELL, E. M., 110*n*  
 SOCIETY ISLANDS, 8  
 SOCOTRA, 287, 382, 547  
 SOEDA, Capt Hisayuki, 695  
 SOLE ISLAND, 691  
 SOLOMON ISLANDS (Map p. 83; Sketch p. 119), 4, 8, 33, 41-3, 45, 53, 62, 74*n*, 88, 112-13, 117-18, 131, 156-7, 160, 186, 225, 231, 260, 273, 282, 285, 332, 470, 478, 489, 602, 667; coastwatchers in, 100, 122-3, 279, 332; campaign in, 113, 119-31, 161, 164-5, 167, 190-1, 226, 228-9, 236, 241, 243, 247-9, 262, 275-6, 278-9, 284, 288-90, 309, 326, 331, 397  
 SOLOMON SEA (Sketch p. 339), 240, 243, 337-8, 439  
 SOMERVILLE, Admiral of the Fleet Sir James, 15-16, 18-19, 38, 61, 79, 81, 126-7, 185, 188, 191, 298, 354, 358, 364, 391, 401*n*, 416-17, 463; assumes command of Eastern Fleet, 13; on escorts for Indian Ocean convoys, 297, 357, 384-8, 393; on role of Eastern Fleet, 363; heads Admiralty Delegation in Washington, 464  
*Sommelsdijk*, Netherlands transport, 538  
 Sonoma, US tug, 329  
 SOONG, Dr T. V., 110

- Sora Maru*, Japanese seaplane tender, 12  
 SORIDO AIRFIELD, 420  
 SORONG (Sketch p. 442), 39, 410, 412-13, 415, 425-6, 429, 434  
*Soryu*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 13, 81, 86, 87*n*  
 SOUTH AFRICA (Map p. 83; Sketch p. 356), 15, 36, 470, 476, 567; German submarines operate in waters off, 209-10, 295-7, 354-5  
 SOUTH AFRICAN AIR FORCE, 190  
 SOUTH AFRICAN ARMY, 187; 1st Division, 92; 2nd Division, 97; Pretoria Regiment, 189  
 SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN, 392*n*  
 SOUTH CHINA SEA (Map p. 502), 260, 515, 576, 595, 600  
*South Dakota*, US battleship, 229, 231-2, 234-5, 457  
 SOUTH-EAST ASIA COMMAND, 353, 358-60, 387, 391-2, 416, 449, 465, 467-8, 473-5, 558, 616, 619, 659, 666, 683  
*Southern Cross*, Australian examination vessel, 180*n*, 212-13, 712  
 SOUTH NEPTUNE ISLAND, 708  
 SOUTH PACIFIC AREA (Sketch p. 33), 33, 41*n*, 61, 113, 116-17, 122-3, 125-7, 132, 162, 171, 173, 191, 225, 228, 238, 275-6, 288, 332, 334, 366; defined, 32; US naval strength in, 275  
 SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC AREA (Sketch p. 33), 1, 30, 33, 37, 41*n*, 54*n*, 56, 108, 117, 125, 171, 225, 238-9, 275-7, 280, 286, 370, 381, 395, 410, 420, 465, 468, 474, 477, 480-1, 514-15, 517, 581, 616, 618, 659, 666-7, 705; Allied shipping losses in, 29, 74-5; Supreme Commander appointed, 31; defined, 32, 100; allocation of Australian defence services to, 34-5; British naval reinforcement, 190-1; Command ceases to exist, 682  
 SOWOM, 626  
*Soya*, Japanese supply ship, 131  
 SPAIN, 1, 200  
 SPANISH MOROCCO, 1, 200  
*Spark*, British submarine, 660  
*Speaker*, British aircraft carrier, 554-5  
*Spearhead*, British submarine, 660  
 SPEAR ISLAND, 244  
 SPENCE, Lt-Col A., 214  
*Spencer*, US coastguard cutter, 648*n*  
 SPENCER, F Lt C. E., 309*n*  
 SPENDER, Hon Sir Percy, 110, 667*n*  
*Spey*, British frigate, 568  
 SPEZIA, 311-12  
 SPRAGUE, Rear-Adm C. A. F., 495, 530-4  
 SPRAGUE, Adm T. L., 495, 506-7, 521, 530, 532-3  
 SPRUANCE, Adm R. A., 81, 84-5, 276-7, 364, 367-8, 395, 451, 454-60, 496, 595, 598, 604-5, 607, 614  
 SPURGEON, Capt A. H., 155*n*  
 SPURGEON, Capt S. H. K., 174-5, 182  
 SPURR, AB F. F., 513*n*  
 STAB OPERATION, 126  
*Stack*, US destroyer, 484  
*Stafford*, US destroyer, 582*n*  
 STALEMATE II OPERATION, 488  
 STALIN, Marshal Joseph, 360, 448, 669-70  
 STALINGRAD, 37, 202, 249, 299  
*Stanvac Manila*, 557*n*  
 STARING BAY, 13-14  
 STARK, Adm H. R., 190  
 STARKEY, Lt W. J., 640, 644  
*Starr King*, US ship, 253-4, 557*n*  
 STARVATION OPERATION, 661  
*Stawell*, Australian corvette; New Guinea, 436*n*, 438, 441; Balikpapan, 657; Hong Kong, 684-5  
*Steady Hour*, Australian patrol boat, 66, 70-1, 74  
 STEELE, Maj-Gen Sir Clive, 688*n*  
 STEELE, AB R. M., 513*n*  
 STEELE, Maj-Gen W. A. B., 698  
 STEINHAGEN, Capt P. W., 331*n*  
*Stella*, Australian survey vessel, 239, 268, 326  
 STEPHENSON, Lt-Cdr C. J., 166, 240; comds *Nepal*, 561-2, 569-70, 664  
 STEPHENSON, AB F. G., 513*n*  
*Stevens*, US destroyer, 486  
 STEVENS, Maj-Gen Sir Jack, 625-8, 630, 633  
*Stevenson*, US destroyer, 371, 376  
 STEVENSON, Rear-Adm H. D., 679  
 STEVENSON, Maj-Gen J. R., 695-6  
 STEWART, Cpl C. M., 544, 692*n*  
 STEWART, Capt G. S., 419  
 STEWART, Lt-Cdr K. O., 684  
 STILWELL, Lt-Gen J. W., 359, 558  
 STIMSON, Henry L., 111-12, 671-2  
 STIRLING RANGE, 115  
*Stockton*, US destroyer, 371, 373-4, 378  
 STOKES, Capt W. R. G., 269  
 STOKIE, Capt L. J., 336  
 STOREY, Cdr A. S., 394  
 STRADBROKE ISLAND, 259  
*Strahan*, Australian corvette, 436*n*, 541*n*, 684-5  
 STRATEGY, *Allied*: 5, 33-4, 55, 60, 449, 465-70, 474, 575; "Beat Hitler First" policy, 8, 106. *Japanese*: 24, 57, 82, 163, 497  
 STREAM OPERATION, 187  
*Striker*, British escort carrier, 612  
 STRIP POINT, 327  
*Stronghold*, British destroyer, 700  
 STRUBLE, Rear-Adm A. D., 495, 501, 507-8, 539, 596-8, 602  
*Stuart*, Australian destroyer, 162, 178, 241, 255*n*, 295, 312; Indian Ocean, 101; New Guinea, 174-6, 181-2, 247; casualties, 712  
 STUART, F-O R., 333  
 STUDENT OPERATION, 311, 313  
 STUMP, Rear-Adm F. B., 495, 529-30, 532, 594, 596  
 STURDEE, Lt-Gen Sir Vernon, 625, 685-6  
 STURT, Lt E. H. W., 690  
 STUTT, F-Lt W. J., 134  
*Stygian*, British submarine, 660  
 SUAI, 176-7  
 SUBAR ISLAND, 323  
 SUBIC BAY, 582, 586, 596-7, 600, 621, 639, 655-6, 660, 676, 680, 683-4  
*Submarine Chaser No. 22*, Japanese craft, 166  
*Submarine Chaser No. 24*, Japanese craft, 166  
 SUBMARINES, *ALLIED*: 419; Japanese shipping tonnage sunk, 661. *AMERICAN*: 80, 105, 121, 165, 414, 453, 556, 661; Marianas, 454-5, 458; Philippines, 516-17, 577. *BRITISH*: Mediterranean, 90, 92; Indian Ocean, 355-7; midjet attack on *Tirpitz*, 360; midjets in Pacific, 660; Japanese shipping tonnage sunk, 661. *DUTCH*: 661. *ENEMY*: 201-3; losses inflicted on Australia Station, 557. *GERMAN*: 15, 29-30; Mediterranean, 2, 89, 96; strength and losses, 26, 249, 251*n*, 300; deployment and tactics, 27, 251, 295-7, 547-9; "Polar Bear" group, 207-10, 355*n*; "Monsoon" group in Indian Ocean, 354-7, 381-8, 392-4; "Seehund" group, 355*n*; Atlantic, 360-1; repair problems at Japanese bases, 392; surrender procedure, 615. *ITALIAN*: 2, 296, 355. *JAPANESE*: 40; deployment and tactics, 27-9; strength and losses, 28*n*; attacks shipping, 61-2, 78-9, 158, 164-5, 185, 202-5, 249, 251-6, 260-2, 355, 357, 382-4, 388, 454, 499, 516-17, 547, 583, 628-9; midjet attack, Sydney Harbour, 61-74; shell Sydney and Newcastle, 77-8; supply land forces, 248-9; sink *Centaur*, 259-60; atrocities, 386; "Kaiten" human torpedo, 489  
 SUBMERSIBLE BOATS, 543-5  
 SUDEST, CAPE, 245-6, 342-3, 371-3, 375-7, 380, 396, 401, 407  
 SUETSUGU, Adm N., 27  
 SUEZ CANAL, 1, 15, 27, 38, 60, 89, 97-8, 184, 249, 287, 301-2, 304, 312, 314  
*Suffolk*, British cruiser, 315, 387, 417, 505  
*Suffren*, French cruiser, 301*n*  
 SULLIVAN, Lt-Cdr P. J., 171, 215-16, 222  
 SULUAN ISLAND, 500, 504-5  
 SULU ARCHIPELAGO, 415  
 SULU SEA (Map p. 502), 499, 514, 517, 519, 522, 539, 600, 621, 639  
 SUMATRA (Map p. 83; Sketch p. 11), 101, 126, 317, 351-2, 388, 397, 401, 414, 417, 463, 465, 467, 640, 669; Japanese invasion, 11-12; naval attacks on oil installations, 571-2  
 SUNDA STRAIT, 32*n*, 192, 197, 388, 390, 419, 548  
 SUPIORI ISLAND, 420, 430  
 SUPPLY, *ALLIED*: 387; Malta, 38, 89-90; Solomons, 161-3, 226, 231; New Guinea, 171, 239, 262, 266-7, 269, 407-8; Timor, 176-8; South Africa, 299; Europe, 304, 444, 447; New Britain, 340; Philippines, 510, 513; RAN ships, 537. *ENEMY*: 184, 303-4, 414, 446, 497-8; North Africa, 30, 89, 98-9, 298-9; Solomons, 231; New Guinea, 262; New Britain, 346-7

- SURABAYA (Sketch p. 320), 416-19, 636  
*Surada*, British ship, 382  
 SURIGAO PENINSULA, 528  
 SURIGAO STRAIT (Map p. 502; Sketch p. 523), 453-4, 499, 507, 514, 517, 529, 531-2, 577, 579-80; Battle of, 516, 521-8, 703  
*Sussex*, British cruiser, 390, 683  
*Sussex*, British steamer, 257  
 SUTHERLAND, Lt-Gen R. K., 31, 158*n*, 171, 225, 276, 331*n*, 479, 515-16, 575  
*Sutlej*, British ship, 382*n*, 386  
*Sutlej*, Indian sloop, 205, 304  
 SUVA, 8, 10, 28, 61, 64, 349  
*Suwannee*, US escort carrier, 400, 511*n*, 533, 649  
 SUZUKI, Adm Baron, 670, 672-3  
 SUZUKI, Lt-Cdr, 696  
 SUZUKI, Lt-Gen Sosaku, 600  
*Suzuya*, Japanese cruiser, 12, 14, 498, 517-18, 530; sunk, 532*n*, 533  
*Swan*, Australian sloop, 549, 708; eastern Australian waters, 101, 295; New Guinea, 171-3, 264, 283, 625-6, 628-32, 635; New Britain, 490-3, 627; at Japanese surrenders, 699-700; casualties, 712  
 SWAN, Lt-Cdr W. N., 482*n*, 650*n*, 651-3  
*Swanson*, US destroyer, 376, 400  
*Swartenhondt*, Netherlands ship, 166*n*, 269*n*, 493  
 SWEETMAN, Lt-Cdr E. J. T., 573  
 SWIFT, Maj-Gen I. P., 379  
*Swiftsure*, British cruiser, 572, 683-4  
 SWINGER BAY, 118, 170  
*Sydney*, Australian cruiser, 124*n*, 312; casualties, 712  
 SYDNEY (Map p. 678; Sketch p. 33), 4, 28, 41, 43, 75, 104, 124, 158, 251-2, 255, 258, 287, 349, 369-70, 375, 380, 470, 548, 549*n*, 550-1, 560-1, 574, 579, 602, 604, 607; midgeet submarine raid on, 61-74, 155, 262; shelled by submarines, 77-8; defences, 105  
 SYDNEY HEADS (Sketch p. 66), 64-8, 70, 73, 78  
 SYFRET, Adm Sir Neville, 37, 45, 60  
 SYME, Lt H. R., GC, 714-15  
 SYRACUSE, 304-6, 311  
 SYRIA, 1, 600
- TABLE BAY, 15, 208-9  
 TACLOBAN, 494-5, 506, 513, 530  
*Tactician*, British submarine, 401*n*, 402  
 TADJIL, 400, 405-6, 409, 436, 461-2  
 TAGOMA, 130  
*Taiho*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 412, 457-8  
*Tajima Maru*, Japanese ship, 413  
*Taimai Maru*, Japanese ship, 270*n*  
 TAINAN, 594  
 TAIT, Adm Sir Campbell, 208-9  
 TAIYU POINT, 162, 164  
*Taiyang*; see *Ramses*  
*Taiyo*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 87*n*  
 TAKAGI, Vice-Adm Takeo, 40-1, 43-51, 53  
 TAKAHASHI, Col T., 685  
*Takanami*, Japanese destroyer, 248  
*Takao*, Japanese cruiser, 14, 234, 457, 498, 517-18  
 TAKASU, Admiral, 388, 390  
 TAKENAKA, Captain, 686  
*Taksang*, British ship, 22*n*  
 TALASEA (Sketch p. 7), 334, 381, 490  
 TALAUD ISLANDS, 479-80, 487, 575  
 TALAWE, MOUNT, 341  
*Tama*, Japanese cruiser, 534  
*Tama Maru*, Japanese minesweeper, 10, 44  
 TAMATAVE (Sketch p. 188), 187, 189  
*Tambar*, HMAS, 712  
*Tambor*, US submarine, 86  
 TAMI, 400  
 TAMURA, Rear-Adm Ryukichi, 700  
*Tamworth*, Australian corvette, 35*n*, 203*n*, 295*n*; commissioned, 104*n*; in Indian Ocean, 204, 356, 384-5, 560-1; Pacific, 573; at Hong Kong, 684  
 TANAHMERAH BAY, 381, 395-6, 399-400, 408, 416-17, 501; landings at, 402-7  
 TANAKA, Rear-Adm R., 81, 163-4, 233-5, 248  
 TANAMBOGO ISLAND, 42, 136, 153  
 TANANARIVE (Sketch p. 188), 187, 189  
*Tancred*, Australian tug, 492  
 TANCRED, Capt G. D., 239, 245, 326-7, 492, 638-40, 644-5  
 TANIKAWA, Maj-Gen, 397  
*Tanimbar*, Netherlands ship, 91
- TANIMBAR ISLANDS (Map p. 263), 211-12, 265  
 TANJONG BATU TIGA, 324-5  
 TANJONG BERA BASAH, 322  
 TANJONG MIRA, 651  
 TANJONG NUSANIVE, 698  
 TANJONG OBUBARI, 541  
 TANJONG PERAK, 418  
 TANJONG PRIOK ROADS, 389  
 TANJONG PUTING, 321  
 TANJONG SAMBAR, 321, 324  
*Tankikaze*, Japanese destroyer, 14*n*, 166  
*Tantalus*, British submarine, 543, 545-6, 691  
 TAN TOEY, 211  
*Tarakan*, Netherlands ship, 197*n*  
 TARAKAN ISLAND (Sketch p. 618), 414, 618-24, 636, 638, 649  
 TARANTO, 93, 312, 446, 703  
 TARANTO, GULF OF, 91  
*Tarantula*, British gunboat, 476  
 TARAWA ATOLL, 343*n*, 347-50, 368  
 TARBUCK, Capt R., 501, 503, 507, 509, 512, 514, 521*n*, 527, 531, 534  
 TARGET HILL, 344  
*Tarifa*, British ship, 382*n*, 386  
*Taroona*, Australian transport, 171, 283  
*Tarpon*, US submarine, 297*n*  
 TARZAN OPERATION, 360
- TASK FORCES, of carriers, 173; system of numbering, 277; established for Sidor operations, 341; reorganised in Seventh Fleet, 381; Aitape Task Force, 461-2; *TF.11*, 8-9, 41, 84; *TF.16*, 81, 229, 232; *TF.17*, 8, 41, 43-5, 49-51, 53, 81, 164, 229; *TF.27*, 663; *TF.31*, 679; *TF.33*, 500; *TF.34*, 529, 532, 534; *TF.37*, 663-4, 674, 679; *TF.38*, 451, 479, 484, 495, 498, 503, 506, 520, 528, 532, 534, 595, 663, 677, 679; *TF.44*, 34, 39*n*, 41, 45, 77*n*, 101, 113, 121, 124, 138, 161-2, 165, 171, 173, 225, 241, 276-7, 288; *TF.50*, 605; *TF.51*, 221, 605; *TF.52*, 605; *TF.54*, 598, 605; *TF.57*, 603-7, 611-14, 616, 630; *TF.58*, 412, 435, 443, 451, 453-9, 598, 604-5, 608, 610, 614; *TF.61*, 124, 161-3, 165; *TF.62*, 137, 140; *TF.64*, 230, 232, 234; *TF.70*, 277*n*; *TF.71*, 277*n*, 417; *TF.72*, 277*n*; *TF.73*, 277*n*; *TF.74*, 277, 288, 290-1, 293, 295, 330, 334, 336-8, 342-5, 369-70, 373, 375, 377-8, 380-1, 395-6, 400-3, 407, 409, 415-18, 421-7, 429-36, 439*n*, 441-3, 460-3, 477, 480, 500, 512, 656, 676; *TF.75*, 381, 400, 402-3, 415-17, 421-7, 429-35, 441-3, 462*n*, 463, 480-1, 483-4, 500; *TF.76*, 277*n*, 288, 338, 343, 369-70, 375, 425, 427, 578*n*; *TF.77*, 400-1, 420-5, 442-3, 481, 483, 516, 531, 577; *TF.78*, 277*n*, 400, 402, 407, 463, 494-5, 577-80, 589; *TF.79*, 494-5, 500-1, 510, 577-8, 580, 586; *TF.88*, 450; *TF.112*, 573, 662; *TF.113*, 572
- Tasman*, Netherlands ship, 118, 166-8, 170, 269*n*  
 TASMAN SEA, 77  
 TASSAFARONGA, 162, 235, 247-8  
 TATHONG CHANNEL, 684  
 TATHRA HEAD, 158  
*Tatra*, Norwegian ship, 197*n*  
*Tatsuta*, Japanese cruiser, 6, 40, 113*n*, 119-20, 128, 157, 166  
 TAUNGUP, 659  
*Taurus*, British submarine, 357  
*Tautog*, US submarine, 61-2  
 TAWITAWI ISLAND, 414-16, 424-5, 435, 453, 620-1, 624, 638, 642, 644, 650-1, 654, 656  
*Taylor*, US destroyer, 480, 583, 600, 603  
 TAYLOR BAY (Map p. 69), 71, 74*n*  
 TAYTAY POINT, 516  
*Teazer*, British destroyer, 674  
 TEHERAN CONFERENCE, 350, 360, 448  
*Teiyo Maru*, Japanese ship, 270*n*  
 TEKNAF, 562-3  
 TELOK BLONGAS, 325  
 TEMIANG STRAIT, 321, 323-4  
*Tenacious*, British destroyer, 674  
 TENARU, 88, 129, 136  
 TENARU RIVER, 161-2  
 TENASSERIM, 10  
*Tenedos*, British destroyer, 16, 18  
 TENNANT, Adm Sir William, 60, 187  
*Tennessee*, US battleship, 3, 381, 495, 510, 522, 528, 531, 606

- Tenryu*, Japanese cruiser, 6, 40, 113*n*, 119, 133, 141, 147, 149, 156, 166-7, 171-2, 183, 260*n*  
*Tenshinzan Maru*, Japanese ship, 413  
*Tenyo Maru*, Japanese ship, 6*n*, 9  
 TERAUCHI, Field Marshal Count, 691  
 TEREKUKURE PLANTATION, 634-5  
*Termagant*, British destroyer, 674  
 TERMINAL CONFERENCE, 669-70, 672  
 TERMOLI, 446  
 TEROWIE, 509  
*Terpsichore*, British destroyer, 674  
*Teruzuki*, Japanese destroyer, 248  
 TESHIMA, Lt-Gen Fusatara, 399, 688-9  
*Teviot*, British frigate, 568  
*Teviot Bank*, British minelayer, 20  
 THAILAND (Sketch p. 11), 10, 32*n*, 494  
*The dens*, Netherlands ship, 269*n*, 283  
 THEOBALD, Rear-Adm R. A., 81, 84  
*Theofano Livanos*, Greek ship, 168-9  
 THOMAS, Capt E. P., 257  
 THOMSON, Lt D. S., 550  
 THOMSON, Sig H. M., 692-3  
*Thor*, German raider, 62-3, 79-80, 192-3, 198, 297  
*Thorn*, US destroyer, 376, 378  
 THORNTON, AB R., 393*n*  
 THOUSAND SHIPS BAY, 42  
*Threadfin*, US submarine, 608-9  
*Three Cheers*, HMAS, 698  
 THURSDAY ISLAND (Map p. 263), 77*n*, 238, 262, 265, 327, 550  
 TIBBETS, Colonel P. W., 672  
 TICAO ISLAND, 600  
*Tiger Snake*, HMAS, 689  
 TMM, Korvetten Kapitän H., 548-9  
 TMOR (Map p. 452; Sketch p. 217), 88, 126, 264, 351, 398, 410, 468; supply and relief of Australians, 176-81, 213-24; Japanese surrender, 693-4  
 TMOR SEA, 218, 224  
 TMOSCHENKO, Marshal S., 53  
 TINIAN ISLAND, 350, 411, 453-5, 459-60, 478, 672  
*Tippicanoe*, US oiler, 41, 43  
*Tirpitz*, German battleship, 251, 360-1  
*Titania*, US attack cargo ship, 501*n*, 638, 640, 642, 654  
*Tjerk Hiddes*, Netherlands destroyer, 189-90, 221-2, 287, 391  
 TREWERI, CAPE, 404  
*Tjinegara*, Netherlands ship, 159, 557*n*  
*Tjisalak*, Netherlands ship, 382*n*, 386  
 TOBRUK (Sketch p. 300), 1, 19, 27, 39, 89-93, 96-8, 112, 222, 262, 304, 436, 438  
 "TOBRUK FERRY", 268, 312, 438  
 TOFO OPERATION, 693  
 TOGO, Admiral, 453-4, 456  
 TOGO, S., 23, 669-70  
 TOIMONAPU (Sketch p. 634), 633-4  
 TOJO, General Hideki, 273, 478  
*Tokitsukaze*, Japanese destroyer, 270*n*, 271-2  
 TOKUYAMA, 608  
 TOKYO (Map p. 678; Sketch p. 662), 22-3, 27, 54, 133, 156, 279, 283, 498, 679, 682; US air attacks on, 24, 598, 663-4, 674  
 TOKYO BAY, 674, 679-81, 683, 701  
 TOKYO RADIO, 260, 615, 650  
 TOLOKIWA ISLAND, 342  
 TOL PLANTATION, 491  
 TOMIOKA, Rear-Adm Sadatashi, 3  
*Tone*, Japanese cruiser, 13, 84-5, 163, 388-90, 498, 517-18, 530, 665  
 TONGATAPU, 8, 41, 53, 121  
*Tongkol*, Australian minesweeper, 708  
 TONKIN GULF, 32*n*  
*Toomaree*, Australian patrol boat, 66, 70  
 TOORBUL POINT, 277  
*Toowoomba*, Australian corvette, 35*n*, 384*n*; Indian Ocean, 197, 203*n*, 204, 295*n*, 297-8; with 21st MS Flotilla, 550, 573; Hong Kong, 685  
 TORCH OPERATION, 200, 202  
*Torelli*, Italian transport submarine, 355  
 TOROKINA (Sketch p. 634), 346, 489, 493, 578, 625, 633-5, 686, 694-6; operations at, 333-4; surrender ceremony, 687  
 TORRES STRAIT (Map p. 263), 41, 262  
 TORRICELLI MOUNTAINS, 461  
*Tourville*, French cruiser, 301*n*
- TOWNLEY, Cdr Hon A. G., comds *Steady Hour*, 71, *ML817*, 326, 327*n*, 328, *ML424*, 330  
*Townsville*, Australian corvette, 295*n*; eastern Australian waters, 253, 550; New Guinea, 436*n*, 541*n*; Rabaul surrender, 685  
 TOWNSVILLE, 39*n*, 50, 77*n*, 114-15, 122, 124, 132, 158*n*, 159, 171-3, 240-1, 285, 330  
 TOYODA, Admiral Soemu, 395, 398, 414, 426, 435, 443, 453-4, 459, 497-8, 504-5  
*TP110*, US tug, 542  
 TRAIN, Lt G. H. C., 161  
 TRAINING, of RAN, 101, 277  
*Trathen*, US destroyer, 417*n*, 426, 431  
 TRAVIS, Cdr A. J., 439, 573, 684  
 TREASURY ISLAND, 331, 333, 490, 635  
 TREMETHICK, AB R. M., 601  
*Trenchant*, British submarine, 547, 640  
*Trento*, Italian cruiser, 92  
*Trident*, British submarine, 355  
 TRIDENT CONFERENCE, 303, 351  
 TRINCOMALEE (Sketch p. 17), 12, 16, 18*n*, 19, 22, 206, 387-8, 391, 397, 401-2, 417, 419, 463, 476-7, 505, 544, 548, 563, 567-9, 574; enemy air attacks, 20  
*Triona*, British ship, 381-2  
 TRIPOLI (Sketch p. 300), 299, 302*n*, 304, 445  
 TRIPOLITANIA, 112, 202  
 TROBIAND ISLANDS (Map p. 263; Sketch p. 169), 170, 174, 243, 272, 277, 281, 292, 328, 337-8; Allies occupy, 285  
*Troilus*, British ship, 93, 547  
*Tromp*, Netherlands cruiser, 62-3, 211, 287, 401*n*, 417*n*, 464, 650  
 TRONDHEIM, 351*n*, 548  
*Troubridge*, British destroyer, 664, 674  
 TROUBRIDGE, Vice-Adm Sir Thomas, 448, 450  
 TRUK, 40-3, 53-4, 61-2, 87, 113-14, 121, 162-4, 165*n*, 231, 397, 413; Allied air attacks, 347, 364, 366, 368; enemy reinforcement, 371  
 TRUMAN, Harry S., 665, 669, 671-3  
 TSCHAUN, Capt K. A., 349-50  
*Tsugaru*, Japanese minelayer, 6*n*, 10, 40, 120, 128, 131, 426, 435*n*  
 TSUSHIMA, 425, 453-4, 456  
 TSUZUKU, PO Masao, 71  
 TUEI, 236, 246, 248-9  
*Tulagi*, British ship, 382*n*, 386-7, 393*n*  
 TULAGI (Map p. 148; Sketch p. 43), 5, 58, 88, 113, 118, 122, 132, 134, 150, 153, 167, 225, 248, 275, 278-9, 289; Japanese invasion, 39-40, 42-5, 53-4; Allied invasion, 116-17, 120, 125-6, 128-31, 136  
 TUM, 410, 418-19, 442, 463  
 TUNISIA (Sketch p. 300), 199, 202, 298-9, 303-4, 310  
*Tunny*, US submarine, 395  
*Turkey*, US tug, 613  
 TURKEY (Sketch p. 94), 1, 107, 313, 599-600  
 TURNER, Adm R. K., 124-5, 135, 137-40, 150-1, 162, 171, 226, 231-2, 274, 289, 347, 348*n*, 350, 355*n*, 367, 382*n*, 455, 598, 604-6, 615; comds Solomons amphibious force, 121; on importance of Guadalcanal, 224-5; comds III Amphibious Force, 277, 285; assessment of, 349; comds Pacific Fleet amphibious forces, 451  
 TWINING, Lt-Gen N. F., 333  
*Tyne*, British destroyer depot ship, 614  
 TYRRELL, Gnr J. G., 291*n*
- U 68*, German submarine, 207*n*, 208-9, 355*n*; *U 156*, 207, 355*n*; *U 159*, 207, 209; *U 160*, 295, 355*n*; *U 168*, 355, 382, 386-7, 392, 548; *U 172*, 207*n*, 208-9, 355*n*; *U 177*, 210, 355*n*; *U 178*, 210, 355, 357, 386; *U 179*, 208, 210, 355; *U 180*, 296, 355*n*; *U 181*, 210, 355*n*, 392, 547-8; *U 182*, 295-6, 355*n*; *U 183*, 355, 392, 548; *U 188*, 355, 382, 384, 386-7; *U 195*, 355*n*, 548; *U 196*, 355*n*, 392*n*, 547-8; *U 197*, 355; *U 198*, 355*n*, 392*n*, 547; *U 205*, 96; *U 219*, 548; *U 459*, 207*n*; *U 504*, 207*n*, 208-9, 355*n*; *U 506*, 295, 355*n*; *U 509*, 295, 355*n*; *U 510*, 392, 548; *U 516*, 355*n*; *U 532*, 355, 382, 385-7, 392, 548; *U 533*, 355-7; *U 537*, 392*n*, 548; *U 843*, 392*n*, 548; *U 852*, 392; *U 859*, 392*n*, 547; *U 861*, 547-8; *U 862*, 547-9, 551. See also SUBMARINES  
*Uckermark*, German tanker, 193*n*  
 UDAUNG CHAUNG, 561  
 UGAKI, Vice-Adm Matoma, 3, 283, 395, 435, 453-4

- Uganda*, British cruiser, 556  
 ULIGAN HARBOUR (Sketch p. 437), 439-41  
 ULITHI ATOLL, 479-80, 484, 488-9, 503, 520, 535, 594-5, 604-5  
*Ulster*, British destroyer, 606-7, 614  
 UMBOI ISLAND (Sketch p. 169), 271, 342  
*Umbra*, British submarine, 92  
 UMEZU, General Yoshijiro, 680-1  
 UNALASKA ISLAND, 82  
*Undine*, British destroyer, 664  
*Uncorn*, British aircraft carrier, 358, 567  
*Unyo*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 87*n*  
 UPTON, Lt K. S., 716  
*Urakaze*, Japanese destroyer, 14*n*, 166  
*Uranami*, Japanese destroyer, 10*n*, 234-5, 270*n*, 272, 426, 429, 434, 435*n*  
*Urchin*, British destroyer, 574  
 UREN, M., 440  
*Ursula*, British submarine, 684  
 USHJIMA, Lt-Gen M., 604  
*Ushio*, Japanese destroyer, 40  
 UTTING, AB P. S., 584*n*  
*Uzuki*, Japanese destroyer, 40, 113*n*, 120, 128  
  
*Valentijn*, Netherlands merchant ship, 696  
*Valiant*, British battleship, 185, 190, 191*n*, 304, 311, 358, 391, 401*n*, 416, 464, 560  
*Vampire*, Australian destroyer, 16, 312; loss of, 20-1; casualties, 712  
 VANDEGRIFT, Lt-Gen A. A., 121, 125, 150, 153, 160, 225, 331  
*Van den Bosch*, Netherlands ship, 269*n*, 693  
*Van der Capellen*, Netherlands ship, 22*n*  
*Van Galen*, Netherlands destroyer, 189-90, 391, 417*n*, 505  
 VANGUARD OPERATION, 473-4  
*Van Heemskerk*, Netherlands ship, 63, 166*n*, 173-4, 264, 269, 281-2  
*Van Heutsz*, Netherlands ship, 63, 174, 269  
 VANIKORO ISLAND, 123  
*Van Outhoorn*, Netherlands ship, 269*n*, 281  
*Van Spilbergen*, Netherlands ship, 269*n*  
 VAN STRATEN, Maj-Gen N. L. W., 688*n*  
*Van Swoll*, Netherlands ship, 269*n*  
 VAN VOLKENBURGH, Brig-Gen Robert H., 118  
 VARIETA, CAPE, 166  
 VELLA GULF, 290, 309, 326  
 VELLA LAVELLA, 232*n*, 279, 289, 309, 326  
 VENABLES, Lt H., 627  
*Vendetta*, Australian destroyer, 19, 295, 312, 464*n*; eastern Australian waters, 101, 261; New Guinea, 436-9, 441; New Britain, 492, 625, 685-6; casualties, 712  
*Venerable*, British aircraft carrier, 683  
*Vengeance*, British aircraft carrier, 683  
 VERDON, AB R. A., 584*n*  
 VERDON, Lt R. A., 245-6  
 VIAN, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Philip, 38, 91-4, 97, 571, 604  
 VICKERY, Maj-Gen N. A., 343  
 VICTORIA (Labuan), 637, 641  
 VICTORIA DOCK, 393-4  
 VICTORIA HARBOUR, 636-8, 641-3  
 VICTORIA POINT, 10  
*Victorious*, British aircraft carrier, 190-1, 464, 505, 571-2, 604, 612-13, 662  
 VICTOR OPERATION, 602  
 VICTUALLING, 102-4, 476  
*Vigilant*, HMAS, 177-8, 213-14, 221-2  
 VILA (New Hebrides), 42, 123-4, 131*n*, 137, 142, 161  
 VILA (Solomon Islands), 278-9, 288, 290, 309  
*Vincennes*, US carrier, 121, 125, 130, 137-9, 149, 153  
 VIRU HARBOUR, 285  
 VISAYAN ISLANDS, 479, 506, 516, 539, 575, 601-3  
*Vita*, British hospital ship, 19, 21  
 VITIAZ STRAIT (Sketch p. 339), 270-1, 326, 331, 334-5, 342, 345, 375  
*Vittorio Veneto*, Italian battleship, 92, 311  
*Viva*, Norwegian ship, 382*n*  
 VIZAGAPATAM, 22, 316, 383  
 VOGELKOP PENINSULA (Map p. 428), 347, 398-9, 410, 413, 420, 429, 434, 442, 460-1, 483  
 VOLCANO ISLANDS, 575  
*Voltaire*, British armed merchant cruiser, 63  
  
*Voyager*, Australian destroyer, 101, 312; in Timor operations, 176; loss of, 178-81, 213; casualties, 712  
 VUNAKANAU, 131-2  
  
 WADDELL, Lt A. N. A., 130, 131*n*, 232*n*, 331  
 WAGA WAGA, 172, 174  
*Wager*, British destroyer, 505, 679  
*Wagga*, Australian corvette, 295*n*; New Guinea operations, 269*n*, 281-3, 436*n*, 439, 541*n*; Hong Kong, 684-5  
 WAIGANI, 118  
 WAINWRIGHT, Lt-Gen Jonathan M., 681  
 WAKDE ISLAND (Map p. 428; Sketch p. 421), 424, 463, 481-4, 492; operations at, 409-12, 415-21  
*Wakeful*, British destroyer, 505, 674  
 WAKE ISLAND, 5, 23-4  
 WALIS ISLAND, 626  
*Walke*, US destroyer, 47, 52, 235  
 WALKER, CPO D. A., 463  
 WALKER, Capt F. R., 145, 152, 326, 330, 337  
 WALKER, Admiral Sir Harold, 683  
 WALKER, Lt-Col T. K., 223*n*  
 WALKERS LTD, 104*n*, 315*n*  
 WALLADER, Ldg Coder P. F., 333  
*Wallaroo*, Australian corvette, 104*n*, 294-5, 709; casualties, 712  
 WALLER, Capt H. M. L., 464*n*  
 WALSH, Capt J. A., 151-2; NOIC Moluccas, 657, 688, 696-7  
*Walter Camp*, US ship, 382  
 WALTON, Capt J. K., 573, 663-4  
 WALVIS BAY, 296  
 WANA WANA ISLAND, 290  
 WARANGOI RIVER, 346  
 WARARI, CAPE, 426  
*Ward*, US destroyer transport, 539  
 WARD, AB C. R., 584*n*  
 WARD, Lt-Cdr N. G., 332*n*  
 WARD HUNT, CAPE (Sketch p. 244), 245, 281, 342, 344  
 WARD HUNT STRAIT, 182, 239  
 WARDO, 424, 426  
 WARNE, Pte D. R., 544*n*  
 WARNER, Engr Lt W. C., 682  
*Warramunga*, Australian destroyer, 94, 253-4, 288, 290, 292, 295, 330, 380-1, 500, 537, 599, 623, 656, 676, 681-2; launched, 104; New Guinea area, 334, 337, 342-3, 345, 370, 373-6, 378, 400, 406, 417*n*, 421-3, 426-7, 430-1, 433, 442-3, 461, 463, 602, 630-1; refits, 369, 462; supply deficiencies, 407; Morotai, 480-1, 485; Leyte, 495, 503*n*, 504, 509, 513, 535-6, 603; Luzon, 579, 583-5, 589, 593-4, 596; Tarakan, 620, 622; Tokyo Bay, 680  
*Warrego*, Australian sloop, 101, 295, 490, 549*n*, 700, 708; New Guinea area, 115-16, 118, 239, 264, 632-3; refits, 501; Philippines operations, 579-81, 584-5, 593, 596-7, 600-2; Balikpapan, 649-50, 652, 654, 656  
 WARREN, WO2 A., 544*n*, 692*n*  
*Warrnambool*, Australian corvette, 295*n*, 549*n*, 550*n*, 555; New Guinea area, 160, 212-13; service in 1941-42, 180; Timor, 181, 214, 693-4; eastern Australian waters, 256, 261; casualties, 713  
*Warspite*, British battleship, 4, 13, 15, 17, 19, 38, 79, 89, 126-7, 147, 185, 189-90, 287, 304, 311  
*Wasatch*, US amphibious force command ship, 481, 580, 586, 648*n*  
*Washington*, US battleship, 4-5, 22*n*, 59, 226-7, 229-30, 232, 234-5, 275  
 WASHINGTON, 29, 32, 34, 55, 91*n*, 107, 111, 126, 225, 351-2, 447, 473, 486, 572, 616; Australian representation at, 56, 110; conferences and missions, 108, 190, 276, 303  
*Washingtonian*, American ship, 22*n*  
 WASHINGTON NAVAL TREATY, 27  
*Wasp*, US aircraft carrier, 38, 59-60, 89, 121, 124, 161, 163-5, 226, 531, 605  
 WATANABE, Cdr Yasuji, 23-4  
 WATCHTOWER OPERATION, 117, 136, 153  
 WATERFALL BAY, 441, 493  
*Waterhen*, Australian destroyer, 19, 312  
*Waters*, US destroyer transport, 285, 289  
 WATOM ISLAND, 346  
 WATSON, Surg Lt-Cdr S. A. C., 95, 524  
 WATSON'S BAY (Map p. 69), 66, 71

- WAVELL, Field Marshal Rt Hon Earl, 13, 22  
*Wave King*, British oiler, 612-13  
*Wave Monarch*, British oiler, 612-13  
WAWAMA, 487  
Wayne, US transport, 501*n*  
*Weazel*, British tug, 613  
WEBB, AB C. J., 181  
WEBB, Cdr C. J. R., 267-8  
WEBBER, AB C. H., 393*n*  
WEBBER, Lt R. B., 396*n*, 406-7  
WEBER, Lt N. G., 295, 573  
WEBSTER, Lt G. J., 349-50  
WEIDEMEYER, Lt-Gen A. C., 364  
WEICHOULD, Vice-Adm E., 27*n*, 39*n*, 89, 96, 98-9, 184*n*  
WEIR, AB S. I., 393*n*  
*Wellen*, Russian ship, 62-3  
*Welles*, US destroyer, 371, 374-6, 378  
WELLS, Capt B. O., 349  
WENEKER, Vice-Adm P. H., 27*n*  
WESR BAY, 440  
WESSEL ISLAND (Map p. 263), 265-6, 505  
*Wessex*, British destroyer, 505  
WEST AFRICA, 296, 301  
*West Cactus*, US ship, 174  
*Westernland*, British ship, 185*n*  
WESTLEY, Maj. G. de V., 698  
WESTON, Cdr H. J., 252, 642, 644  
*Westralia*, Australian armed merchant cruiser, 10, 65, 101, 112, 176, 185*n*, 277; converted to LSI, 278; New Guinea area, 338, 342, 396, 400, 404-5, 407; service in 1943-44, 481-2; Philippines operations, 495, 501, 507-8, 578, 580, 586-8, 590-2; Borneo operations, 620-1, 623, 638, 640-2, 646, 649-55; at Ambon surrender, 698  
*West Virginia*, US battleship, 495, 509, 522, 528, 589, 591, 596  
WEWAK (Map p. 263; Sketch p. 437), 264, 275, 281, 347, 381, 400, 409, 411*n*, 413, 461, 625, 627-8; enemy strength and reinforcement, 270, 397, 399; Allied attacks on, 328, 380, 395, 629-33  
WEYLER, Vice-Adm G. L., 495, 506, 522, 535-6, 583, 596  
*Whang Pu*, HMAS, 713  
*Wheatland*, British destroyer, 202  
*Whelp*, British destroyer, 505, 679  
*Whipple*, US destroyer, 41  
WHITE, AB D. F., 256  
WHITEBROOK, Lt-Cdr H. G., 698-9  
*Whitehaven*, British corvette, 307-8  
WHITEHEAD, Brig D. A., 619  
WHITEHEAD, Lt-Gen E. C., 331*n*, 410-11  
*White Plains*, US escort carrier, 530, 533  
WHITTAKER, AB H. R., 584*n*  
WHITTING, Lt W. G., 219  
*Whylla*, Australian corvette, 35, 65, 68, 70, 295, 537; in eastern Australian waters, 77*n*, 78; New Guinea operations, 246, 268, 281-2, 436*n*; in 21st MS Flotilla, 550, 572; Hong Kong, 684  
WHYALLA, 75-6, 104*n*, 253-4  
WICKHAM ANCHORAGE, 285  
WIDE BAY, 335-6, 490-3, 625, 627  
WIEDEMANN, Sub-Lt Rev W. G. G., 341-4  
WIGHT, Lt-Cdr E. J. B., 140, 142-3, 233; comds *Warrnambool*, 555  
*Wilcannia*, Australian minesweeper, 265*n*, 550*n*  
WILD, Col C. H. D., 692*n*  
WILDING, Capt William, 129  
Wilkes, US destroyer, 376  
WILKINSON, Lt-Cdr J. B., 74*n*  
WILKINSON, Rear-Adm T. S., comds III Amphibious Force, 289, 330-1, 333, 366-7, 370, 451, 480, 494-5, 510, 576-8, 586, 588, 591  
WILLERSDORF, WO J., 544*n*  
*William Dawes*, US ship, 158, 557*n*  
WILLIAMS, Ldg Seaman D. J., 393*n*  
WILLIAMS, Stoker G. H., 21*n*  
WILLIAMS, Capt H. L., 335-6  
WILLIAMS, Lt-Col T. E., 696-7  
WILLIAMS, Ldg Cook W. B., 220  
WILLIAMS, Lt-Cdr W. J., 440  
WILLIAMSTOWN DOCKYARD, 104*n*, 295, 551, 561, 570, 650  
WILLIS, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Algernon, 15-16  
*Willoughby*, US tender, 639, 689  
WILLOUGHBY, Maj-Gen C. A., 238  
Wilson, US destroyer, 130, 138-9, 142, 149, 153  
WILSON, Field Marshal Lord, 449-50, 617  
WILSON, Lt-Cdr P. F., 64, 72-3  
WILSON, Lt-Cdr W. J., 193, 195-6  
WILSON'S PROMONTORY, 551, 708  
WINDEYER, Maj-Gen Rt Hon Sir Victor, 329, 637, 642  
WINGATE, Maj-Gen O. C., 351-2  
*Winooski*, US oiler, 643  
WITHERS, Teleg T., 333  
*Wollongbar*, Australian ship, 256, 259, 557*n*  
*Wollongong*, Australian corvette, 35*n*, 295*n*, 315*n*; Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf, 203*n*, 204, 297-8, 301, 314, 393, 560; in Mediterranean, 305-6, 312; in 22nd MS Flotilla, 573; Hong Kong, 684  
WOM, CAPE, 629, 632, 690  
WONOKRONO, 418  
WOOD, Maj-Gen G. N., 566  
WOOD, Dr Thomas, 440  
WOODLARK ISLAND (Sketch p. 119), 45, 276, 284-5, 328, 338  
WOOTEN, Maj-Gen Sir George, 328, 619, 637, 642, 644  
*Worcestershire*, British armed merchant cruiser, 185  
*Worden*, US destroyer, 43*n*  
WORDSWORTH, Lt A. A., 541  
WOTJE ISLAND, 5, 367, 369  
*Wrangler*, British destroyer, 674  
WRIGHT, Rear-Adm C. H., 247  
WRIGHT, Cdr H. C., 211, 513  
WRIGHT, Lt-Cdr M. H., 335-6  
*Wyangerie*, British ship, 66  
  
XE.4, British midget submarine, 660  
  
*Yahagi*, Japanese cruiser, 498, 517, 520, 530, 608-10  
YAKAMUL, 462-3  
YALI, Sgt, 396*n*, 406-7  
YALTA CONFERENCE, 599-600, 616, 669  
YAMADA, Lt-Gen, 694  
YAMADA, Rear-Adm Sadayoshi, 88, 114  
*Yamagumo*, Japanese destroyer, 435*n*, 517, 523-4, 532*n*  
YAMAMOTO, Admiral Isoroku, 3, 5, 23-4, 53, 57-9, 81-2, 84, 86, 156, 229, 279, 398, 497; death of, 282-3, 395  
YAMAMURA, Maj-Gen Heili, 689  
YAMAOKA, Capt Mineo, 54  
*Yamashiro*, Japanese battleship, 498, 517, 523, 524-6, 528, 703; sunk, 527, 529, 532*n*  
*Yamato*, Japanese battleship, 23, 59, 81, 87, 415*n*, 435, 457, 498, 517-18, 520-1, 530, 595, 608; sunk, 609-10  
YAME ISLAND, 7  
*Yandra*, Australian anti-submarine vessel, 77*n*, 552; in Japanese midget submarine raid on Sydney Harbour, 66, 68, 70, 74  
YANO, Capt Minoru, 168  
YAP, 454, 479-80, 484, 500, 575  
*Yarra*, Australian sloop, 518*n*, 549, 708; casualties, 713  
*Yarruma*, Australian channel patrol boat, 66-7, 70-1, 74  
*Yayoi*, Japanese destroyer, 40, 167, 174-5, 183  
YEOMANS, Ldg Writer J., 504*n*  
*Yiannis*, see *Amiral Pierre*  
YMS160, US motor minesweeper, 638, 640, 644; YMS196, 650; YMS316, 587, 596; YMS393, 506  
Yochow, 269*n*  
YOKOHAMA, 192, 193*n*, 197, 297, 681  
*Yokohama Maru*, Japanese transport, 6, 9  
YOKOI, Rear-Adm, 608*n*  
YOKOSUKA, 679  
*Yoma*, British ship, 302  
YONAI, Adm M., 497  
YONTAN AIRFIELD, 606  
York, US tanker, 542-3  
*Yorktown*, US aircraft carrier, 4-5, 8-9, 41, 43-5, 49, 51-3, 59, 81, 84-6, 605  
*Yoshida Maru No. 1*, 413  
YOSHIMURA, Cdr Iwao, 62  
YOUNG, Ldg Telegraphist H. S., 319  
YSABEL ISLAND, see SANTA YSABEL ISLAND  
*Yubari*, Japanese cruiser, 6, 10, 40, 113*n*, 133, 141, 147, 149, 156  
*Yudachi*, Japanese destroyer, 164, 233



- Yugiri*, Japanese destroyer, 12*n*, 14*n*, 40  
*Yugumo*, Japanese destroyer, 326  
*Yugure*, Japanese destroyer, 40  
*Yuiho*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 412  
*Yukikaze*, Japanese destroyer, 270-2  
*Yunagi*, Japanese destroyer, 10, 113*n*, 120, 133, 141-2, 146, 156-7  
*Yunnan*, Australian stores issuing ship, 497  
*Yura*, Japanese light cruiser, 11, 14  
*Yuzuki*, Japanese destroyer, 40, 44, 113*n*, 120, 128, 157  
  
 ZAMBALES, 596-7  
 ZAMBOANGA, 426, 600-1, 620, 633  
 ZAMPA POINT, 606  
  
 ZANANA, 288  
*Zane*, US destroyer, 252  
 ZANZIBAR, 28  
*Zara*, Italian cruiser, 147  
*Zealandia*, Australian transport, 176  
*Zeilin*, US transport, 226  
 ZIPPER OPERATION, 660, 682-3  
 "Z" PLAN, 398, 414, 497  
*Zuiho*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 87*n*, 88, 230-1, 457, 498; sunk, 532*n*, 534  
*Zuikaku*, Japanese aircraft carrier, 13, 40-1, 46, 51-2, 54, 87*n*, 88, 161, 163, 230-1, 412, 458-9, 498, 532; sunk, 532*n*, 534  
*Zwaardvisch*, Netherlands submarine, 387*n*, 548